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Concern over 'attainment gap' as GCSEs return to pre-Covid levels

Minister's pledge as wide regional variation in exam grades revealed

Richard Adams
Education editor

The aftermath of the Covid pandemic has been squeezed out of GCSE results as 16-year-olds received grades more similar to pre-pandemic levels in England, Wales and Northern Ireland.

But there were wide regional variations in results across England, with students in London powering ahead of pre-pandemic grades, while top grades in Wales and Northern Ireland came down with a bump compared with last year.

Ian Bauckham, the head of England's exams regulator, Ofqual, hailed this year's results as a return to consistency, with 70.4% of entries by pupils in year 11 receiving a grade 4 – equivalent to a C – or higher, a touch higher than the 70.3% in 2023 and half a percentage point above 2019.

Bauckham said: "It is evidence that we have settled back into a pattern of dependable and trustworthy results."

"Exams and assessments are tough tests for students, but they want the opportunity to demonstrate what they know, understand and can do – and they want their final qualification grade to reflect this accurately."

"The exam system in England has delivered



▲ Students at City of London academy, Southwark. Pupils in the capital outperformed those elsewhere in England PHOTOGRAPH: LEON NEAL/GETTY IMAGES

We won't give unions a blank cheque – Reeves

Larry Elliott
Economics editor

Rachel Reeves has insisted there will be "no blank cheques" for public sector unions amid Conservative claims that the government's attempt to end long-running strikes has made it a

soft touch. The chancellor said there had been no caving in to train drivers and junior doctors, and defended her decision to accept recommendations of pay review bodies for real terms increases for the police, teachers and the armed forces on the grounds that they were needed to recruit and retain staff.

Interviewed on a visit to Liverpool to see a new rent-to-buy housing development in the city's docklands, Reeves hinted that she intended to give herself extra scope to borrow by changing the definition of how debt is calculated to meet the government's self-imposed fiscal rules.

Reeves stressed that the budget would contain tough tax, spending and welfare measures but said she wanted to be seen as a chancellor that took the "fair and right decisions".

James Cleverly, one of the candidates to be the new Conservative party leader, said Labour had been

"played by its union paymasters" following the pay deal offered to Aslef train drivers, but Reeves said ministers wanted to "draw a line" under strikes that had proved costly for the economy.

The public needed to know trains would arrive and hospital appointments they had been waiting for for months would not be cancelled, she said. "We have not caved in to any demands. We haven't done so with the train drivers or the junior doctors."

Reeves said she made no apology for ensuring that

Jenas sacked by BBC after claims about conduct

News
Page 5 →



Inside 23/08/24
Four sections
every day

News and Sport

Yacht tragedy

Italian officials yesterday confirmed the death of entrepreneur Mike Lynch
Page 4

Journal Outside G2

Opinions and ideas

It's the ice-lolly principle: exams are not the only way to learn
Michael Rosen

Page 3

G2 Centre pullout

Features and arts

'Bigger than the Bible'

Peter Brook's dazzling version of the Indian epic The Mahabharata is back
Page 4

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Weather

Page 34

Quick crossword

Back of G2

Cartoon

Journal, page 4

Cryptic crossword

Back of Journal

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News



Janusz Raczy, a scientist, receives an mRNA cancer vaccine called BNT116 at a clinic in London as part of a trial in seven countries

PHOTOGRAPH: AARON CHOWN/PA

World first as lung cancer patients start to receive trial mRNA vaccine

Andrew Gregory
Health editor

Doctors have begun trialling the world's first mRNA lung cancer vaccine in patients, as experts hailed its "groundbreaking" potential to save thousands of lives.

Lung cancer is the world's leading cause of cancer death, accounting for about 1.8m deaths every year. Survival rates in those with advanced forms of the disease, where tumours have spread, are particularly poor.

Now experts are testing a new jab that instructs the body to hunt down and kill cancer cells – then prevents them from ever coming back. Known as BNT116 and made by BioNTech, the vaccine is designed to treat non-small cell lung cancer (NSCLC), the most common form of the disease.

The phase 1 clinical trial, the first human study of BNT116, has launched across 34 research sites in seven countries: the UK, US,

Germany, Hungary, Poland, Spain and Turkey. The UK has six sites, located in England and Wales, with the first UK patient to receive the vaccine having their initial dose on Tuesday.

Overall, about 130 patients – from early-stage before surgery or radiotherapy, to late-stage disease or recurrent cancer – will be enrolled to have the jab alongside immunotherapy. About 20 will be from the UK.

The jab uses messenger RNA (mRNA), similar to Covid-19 vaccines, and works by presenting the immune system with tumour markers from NSCLC to prime the body to fight cancer cells expressing these markers. The aim is to strengthen a person's immune response to cancer while leaving healthy cells untouched, unlike chemotherapy.

"We are now entering this very exciting new era of mRNA-based immunotherapy clinical trials to investigate the treatment of lung cancer," said Prof Siow Ming Lee,

a consultant medical oncologist at University College London hospitals NHS foundation trust (UCLH), which is leading the trial in the UK.

"It's simple to deliver, and you can select specific antigens in the cancer cell, and then you target them. This technology is the next big phase of cancer treatment."

Janusz Raczy, 67, from London, was the first person to have the vaccine in the UK. He was diagnosed in May and soon after started chemotherapy and radiotherapy.

The scientist, who specialises in AI, said his profession had inspired him to take part in the trial.

"I am a scientist too, and I understand that the progress of science – especially in medicine – lies in people agreeing to be involved in such investigations," he said.

He added: "It would be very beneficial for me, because it's a new methodology not available for other patients that can help me to get rid of the cancer. And also, I can be a

part of the team that can provide proof of concept for this new methodology, and the faster it would be implemented across the world, more people will be saved."

Raczy received six consecutive injections five minutes apart over 30 minutes at the National Institute for Health Research UCLH clinical research facility on Tuesday.

Each jab contained different RNA strands. He will get the vaccine every week for six consecutive weeks, and then every three weeks for 54 weeks.

Lee said: "We hope adding this additional treatment will stop the cancer coming back because a lot of the time for lung cancer patients, even after surgery and radiation, it does come back."

He added: "I've been in lung cancer research for 40 years now. When I started in the 1990s, nobody believed chemotherapy worked."

"We now know about 20-30% [of patients] stay alive with stage 4 with immunotherapy and now we want to improve survival rates. So hopefully this mRNA vaccine, on top of immunotherapy, might provide the extra boost."

"We hope to go on to phase 2, phase 3, and then hope it becomes standard of care worldwide and saves lots of lung cancer patients."

The Guardian revealed in May that thousands of patients in England were to be fast-tracked into groundbreaking trials of cancer vaccines in a revolutionary world-first NHS "matchmaking" scheme to save lives.

Under the scheme, patients who meet the eligibility criteria will gain access to clinical trials for the vaccines that experts say represent a new dawn in cancer treatment.

Lord Vallance, the science minister, hailed the launch of the lung cancer vaccine trial. "This approach has the potential to save the lives of thousands diagnosed with lung cancer every year," he said. "We back our researchers so that they continue to be an integral part of projects that produce groundbreaking therapies, like this one."

Raczy hopes that once his treatment is over he can get back to running and achieve his lifetime ambition: completing the London Marathon.

Asylum backlog crept up before election despite Sunak's pledges

Rajeev Syal
Home affairs editor

The UK's asylum backlog has crept upwards in 2024, statistics show, despite pledges by the last government to drive numbers down.

Home Office figures show 118,882 people were waiting for an initial decision on asylum applications in the UK at the end of June, up slightly from the 118,329 waiting at the end of March.

The number of asylum decisions fell sharply in the weeks before the July general election, the data indicates. In the second quarter of this year, the Home Office made decisions on 15,965 applications, down from 24,348 in the first three months. Only 1,150 asylum interviews took place in

June, down from more than 8,000 last October, according to the data.

The UK's asylum backlog has been at the heart of the political row over immigration because it leaves the taxpayer with a housing bill of £8m a day and means the lives of applicants are left in limbo.

In December 2022 the then prime minister, Rishi Sunak, said he planned to "abolish the backlog of initial asylum decisions" as part of a plan to reduce illegal immigration.

Marley Morris, from the Institute for Public Policy Research (IPPR), said the new data showed how difficult Keir Starmer's task was if he hoped to improve the asylum system.

"Despite the previous home secretary making progress on clearing the backlog of asylum claims last year, the backlog has barely changed in

recent months as ministers were distracted by the Rwanda plan," he said.

"The government has done the right thing in cancelling the Rwanda deal and unblocking asylum processing, but further reform will be necessary to bring down the backlog and close down eye-wateringly expensive asylum hotels."

Peter Walsh, a senior researcher at the University of Oxford's Migration Observatory, said the change may be due to the Tory government's reluctance to process claimants under the Illegal Migration Act who could not be granted leave to remain except under limited circumstances.

"Until earlier this year, the government was still working through applications that weren't affected by the Illegal Migration Act, which

meant it was able to progressively reduce the backlog.

"It seems that the new legislation started to bite in the spring, when the Home Office ran out of older cases to process. In theory, the previous government did have some discretion to continue to process claims – as Labour says it is now doing – but it appears to have decided not to use it."

There were 1,891 asylum applications in the so-called "legacy" backlog – dating back to before June 2022 – that were still awaiting an initial decision at the end of June, figures show. The non-legacy backlog of asylum cases awaiting an initial decision – covering applications made on or after 28 June 2022 – stood at 83,948 at the end of June.

The data also shows Starmer has inherited a fall in net migration after changes introduced by Sunak's government. There was a 156,000 (27%) reduction in the total number of work and study visas issued, from 583,000 in January to June 2023 to 427,000 in the same period of 2024.

118,882

The number of people waiting for an initial decision on asylum applications at the end June

▼ *Megalopolis*, a sci-fi epic, has long been a passion project of Coppola (below right) and comes after many mishaps and delays PHOTOGRAPH: AP



▲ The trailer misquoted reviews of films including *The Godfather*, top

Francis Ford Coppola's *Megalopolis* trailer withdrawn over fake quotes by film critics

Benjamin Lee
Nadia Khomami

Lionsgate has withdrawn its trailer for the self-funded Francis Ford Coppola epic *Megalopolis* after it was criticised for including false and misleading quotes, with the film company admitting: "We screwed up."

The trailer, released on Wednesday, starts by going back in time to show negative quotes from established critics for acclaimed films from Coppola's past such as *The Godfather* and *Apocalypse Now*. "Genius is often misunderstood," says the accompanying narration.

The entertainment site Vulture's Bilge Ebiri pointed out that many of the quotes were manufactured and

could not be found in the original reviews. He noted that the former New Yorker film critic Pauline Kael's alleged *Godfather* quote – "diminished by its artsiness" – was nowhere to be found in her glowing reviews of the first two films.

While the Village Voice's Andrew Sarris was not a fan of *The Godfather*, the quote used in the trailer – "a sloppy, self-indulgent movie" – was also not in his review. Similarly, while the Daily News critic Rex Reed did not like *Apocalypse Now*, the quote being attributed – "an epic piece of trash" – was also nowhere to be found.

"Lionsgate is immediately recalling our trailer for *Megalopolis*" a spokesperson said in a statement to Variety. "We offer our sincere apologies to the critics involved and to

'We offer our sincere apologies to the critics involved. We screwed up. We are sorry'

Lionsgate
in statement to Variety

Francis Ford Coppola and American Zoetrope for this inexcusable error in our vetting process. We screwed up. We are sorry."

Roger Ebert was accused of claiming that 1992's *Bram Stoker's Dracula* was "a triumph of style

over substance" yet it was not in his positive review. Variety's Owen Gleiberman was also misquoted in the trailer. "Even if you're one of those people who don't like critics, we hardly deserve to have words put in our mouths," he said in response.

Megalopolis premiered at the Cannes film festival to mixed reviews, with the Guardian's Peter Bradshaw calling it "a bloated, boring and bafflingly shallow film". Described as "a Roman epic set in modern America", the film starring Adam Driver cost Coppola a reported \$120m (£92m) and was bought by Lionsgate for US distribution.

The film is set to be released next month. "Taking on critics might be an exciting and cathartic marketing tactic, but I suspect *Megalopolis* will

need critics championing it when it actually comes out," Ebiri wrote. "And making up fake quotes from our heroes is probably not the best way to get us on your side."

The Guardian has approached Lionsgate for comment.

Megalopolis, a sci-fi epic, has been nearly 50 years in the making. Coppola first conceived of the idea while making *Apocalypse Now* and was fuelled by the same concerns about US imperialism.

The film is set in an imaginary US and follows the visionary architect Cesar Catilina (Driver), who clashes with a corrupt mayor (Giancarlo Esposito) over how to rebuild the metropolis of New Rome after a devastating disaster.

But the auteur's passion project has gone through innumerable rewrites, delays and false starts. Preparations for the film came together in 1989, but filming was postponed after Coppola prioritised other projects after a string of box office disappointments.

The film was revived in 2001 but abandoned after 9/11.

Coppola announced his return to the project in 2019 and sold a portion of his winery in California to finance the project, but the Covid pandemic delayed it again.

Last month, footage emerged of Coppola trying to kiss female extras on the set, with sources alleging unprofessional behaviour by the director.

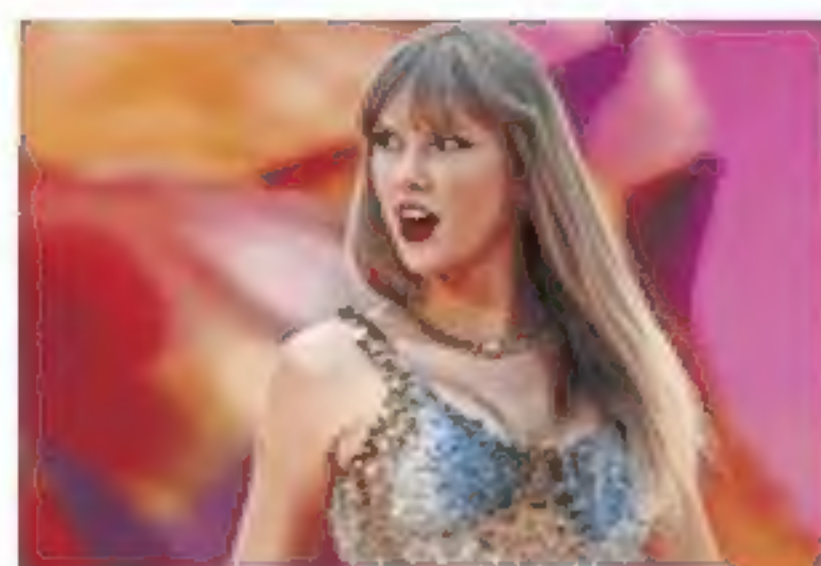
In response, Coppola told the New York Times: "I'm not touchy-feely. I'm too shy. My mother told me that if you make an advance toward a woman, it means you disrespect her, and the girls I had crushes on, I certainly didn't disrespect them," he added.

Swift tells of 'tremendous guilt' after terror plot cancelled shows

Michael Sun

Taylor Swift has spoken for the first time about the three Vienna shows on her blockbuster Eras tour that were cancelled earlier this month after a foiled terror attack, saying she felt "a new sense of fear" and a "tremendous amount of guilt".

The planned attack was uncovered



▲ Taylor Swift was thankful 'we were grieving concerts and not lives'

by Austrian authorities who eventually arrested three suspects – aged 17, 18 and 19 – for allegedly plotting an Islamist attack in the Vienna region, with Swift's shows being the "focus".

The police said the 19-year-old prime suspect had pledged his allegiance to the Islamic State (IS) group "in recent weeks" and had become radicalised on the internet. Bomb chemicals were seized at his house.

In an Instagram post on Wednesday night celebrating the end of the tour's European leg, which concluded with five London shows, Swift shared her "rollercoaster of emotions".

"Having our Vienna shows cancelled was devastating," she wrote.

"The reason for the cancellations filled me with a new sense of fear, and a tremendous amount of guilt because so many people had planned on coming to those shows. But I was also so grateful to the authorities because thanks to them, we were grieving concerts and not lives."

The singer thanked her fans for their "love and unity" and said all her energy went into protecting "the nearly half a million people I had coming to see the shows in London" after the Vienna cancellations.

"My team and I worked hand in hand with stadium staff and British authorities every day in pursuit of that goal, and I want to thank them

for everything they did for us," Swift wrote. "Let me be very clear: I am not going to speak about something publicly if I think doing so might provoke those who would want to harm the fans who come to my shows."

The Instagram post was the first Swift had shared since the Vienna incident. She acknowledged her silence in the intervening weeks, calling it a form of "showing restraint". "My priority was finishing our European tour safely, and it is with great relief that I can say we did that," she added. The Vienna shows were planned for 8 to 10 August at the Ernst Happel Stadium. Swift will resume her Eras tour in Miami in October.

Friends and colleagues pay tribute as Lynch confirmed dead in Sicily yacht disaster

Jamie Grierson
Matthew Weaver
Lorenzo Tondo

The British tech entrepreneur Mike Lynch has been confirmed dead by search and rescue authorities after his yacht sank off the coast of Sicily during a violent storm.

Lynch, 59, the founder of Autonomy Corporation, was among six people missing after the British-flagged 56-metre boat Bayesian capsized at about 5am local time on Monday off the coast of Palermo, when the area was hit by a tornado.

Lynch's body was retrieved from the wreck yesterday, Massimo Mariani, an interior ministry official, told Reuters after being briefed by the emergency services. Agence France-Presse also reported that Lynch's body had been recovered, citing a coastguard official. His wife, Angela Bares, was rescued on Monday, while his 18-year-old daughter, Hannah, is still unaccounted for. Mariani said her body may be inside the wreck or she could have been tossed into the sea as the boat sank.

A spokesperson for the Italian fire brigade said it could take days for the last missing person to be found, given



▲ Mike Lynch's body was retrieved from the sunken vessel yesterday



▲ Judy and Jonathan Bloomer are believed to have died in the incident

the difficulties facing the divers on a wreck 50m (165ft) below the surface.

The bodies of four people were recovered from the wreck on Wednesday. The body of the yacht's chef, Recaldo Thomas, was found on Monday, shortly after the vessel sank.

Lynch, once described as Britain's Bill Gates, spent much of the last decade defending his name against fraud allegations related to Autonomy's sale to the US tech company Hewlett-Packard for \$11bn (£7bn).

He was acquitted by a jury in San Francisco in June after more than a year living in effect under house arrest. The boat trip was a celebration of being cleared of the charges.

Lord Browne, the chair of the Francis Crick Institute, was among the first to pay tribute to Lynch. In a post on X, he wrote: "Mike Lynch

should be remembered as the person who catalysed a breed of deep tech entrepreneurs in the UK.

"His ideas and his personal vision were a powerful contribution to science and technology in both Britain and globally. I send my condolences to those close to him. We have lost a human being of great ability."

Lynch was a member of the Create the Change fundraising board, set up by Cancer Research UK and which helped fund the building of the institute. He was also a director of the BBC for five years.

David Tabizel, Lynch's co-founder at Autonomy, posted on X: "It looks like we've lost our dear Dr Mike Lynch. RIP. The world has lost a genius. His family have lost a giant of a man."

The Royal Academy of Engineering,

where Lynch was a fellow, said in a statement: "Mike became a fellow of the Royal Academy of Engineering in 2008 and we have fond memories of the active role he played in the past, as a mentor, donor and former council member. He was also one of the inaugural members on the enterprise committee. Our thoughts are with his family and friends at this time."

Tim Davie, BBC director general, paid tribute to Lynch yesterday. He said: "We are deeply saddened by the awful news about the deaths of those aboard the Bayesian yacht. Mike Lynch was an outstanding BBC director, who made a major contribution during his time on the board, from 2007 to 2012."

Earlier yesterday, a senior official confirmed to the Guardian that divers had found a fifth body from the wreck. The head of Sicily's civil protection agency, Salvatore Cocina, said it was taken to Porticello's pier.

Italian media, quoting sources among the divers, said the victims retrieved on Wednesday were Chris Morvillo and his wife, Neda, as well as the executive chair of Morgan Stanley International, Jonathan Bloomer, and his wife, Judy. The Bloomers' family said they were "incredible people".

Questions remain about why the yacht sank within minutes. The head of the company that built it yesterday hit back at suggestions that the length of its mast was a risk factor.

Giovanni Costantino, head of the Italian Sea Group, which includes the Perini Navi company, insisted it was safe. In an interview with Italy's Corriere della Sera, Costantino cited hatches being left open and the keel not being fully lowered.

Journal Obituary Page 6 →

Gatwick boss hopeful £2.2bn plan for second runway will get green light

Jack Simpson

The boss of Gatwick said he "hopes and expects" the government will back the airport's plans for a second runway, adding that its proposals would bring extra capacity to the south-east more quickly than a third runway at Heathrow.

Stewart Wingate, who has been the airport's chief executive since 2009, said the £2.2bn plan to create a fully functioning second runway by the end of the decade had strong credentials and could "chime" with the government's growth agenda.

Gatwick, one of the busiest single runway airports in the world, is planning to move the centre line of its northern runway, largely used as a taxiway, 12 metres (39ft) north in order to allow planes to take off while others land on the existing runway.

A six-month public examination of the scheme will end next week, with the planning inspectors submitting a recommendation to the government before ministers make a decision in the first half of next year.

Speaking yesterday, Wingate referenced the government's decision on Monday to give approval to the expansion of City airport in east London, and said Gatwick's plan fitted with previous policies that encouraged airports using existing infrastructure to increase capacity.

He said: "We very much are hoping and expect that when it falls on the government desk, which will be towards the end of November this year, in the three months where they have time to deliberate their decision, that they come out and support us."

The Labour government's position on airport expansion faced scrutiny over its approval of City airport's plan to increase capacity from 6.5 million to 9 million passengers a year. The decision was criticised by environmental campaigners and Newham council, which opposed the move.

Keir Starmer's spokesperson told the Telegraph in July that the government was "not opposed in principle to new or longer runways or to people flying more" but that these must meet "clear conditions" on pollution, obligations over the climate crisis, and lead to economic growth.

Wingate said it would add £1bn to the gross domestic product (GDP) each year and create 14,000 jobs.

However, when fully operational at the end of the next decade, passenger numbers are expected to be 78 million people, with 386,000 flights.

A government spokesperson said: "We are committed to securing the long-term future of the UK's aviation sector. However, all expansion proposals must demonstrate they contribute to economic growth, while remaining in line with existing environmental obligations."



▲ Rescuers are still looking for Hannah Lynch, 18, who has been missing since Bayesian sank on Monday night PHOTOGRAPH: ALBERTO PIZZOLI/AFP/GETTY IMAGES

Postcard mystery
How could message arrive 121 years late?
Page 9

Culture clubbed
Scottish arts groups in warning over cuts
Page 12



National

5



BBC sacks football pundit Jermaine Jenas after claims about his conduct at work

Caroline Davies
Cash Boyle

Jermaine Jenas, a presenter on The One Show and who appears on Match of the Day, has been sacked by the BBC after complaints about his workplace conduct.

The former footballer, 41, has said he is seeking legal advice after being taken off the air from both shows.

The BBC reported his contract had been terminated after allegations involving text messages and other digital communication.

It is understood issues were raised a few weeks ago with the broadcaster, which issued a statement yesterday to confirm Jenas was “no longer part” of its presenting lineup. He was last on air earlier in the summer.

The presenter and pundit, long mooted as a potential long-term replacement for Match of the Day host Gary Lineker, has also parted ways with his agency M&C Saatchi.

News of Jenas’s departure broke as he was presenting a programme

for TalkSport, where he also works as a broadcaster. During an interview with TalkSport News yesterday evening, the 41-year-old said “there’s two sides to every story”.

“I’m not happy about this situation. I’m going to be speaking to my lawyers about it, is all I can say right now,” he added.

Jenas declined to elaborate about the nature of the complaint about him, whether it concerned more than one colleague, if he was surprised a complaint was made against him, when he was first aware that a complaint had been made and when the BBC told him he was being sacked.

He also declined to answer when asked if legal proceedings were under way, whether he felt he would be able to continue working in sports presenting, or the broadcast industry as a whole, or if he felt he should apologise to anyone about his departure from the BBC.

A spokesperson for TalkSport said it was “made aware of a breaking news story involving Jermaine Jenas as he went on air for a one-off

presenting slot on TalkSport Drive. We made a decision – with Jermaine – that he should continue to present the show.”

The spokesperson added: “Given the array of serious allegations being reported as the story continues to evolve, it’s for Jermaine as a private individual to address them in the way he chooses.”

“There are no plans for Jermaine to broadcast as a presenter on TalkSport in the immediate future.”

According to the Sun, the BBC launched an immediate internal

‘I’m not happy about this situation. I’m going to be speaking to my lawyers about it, is all I can say’

Jermaine Jenas
Former footballer

▲ *Jermaine Jenas was considered by many as a potential successor to Gary Lineker on Match of the Day*
PHOTOGRAPH: DANIEL CHESTERTON/OFFSIDE

investigation after concerns were raised about the former England, Tottenham Hotspur and Newcastle United midfielder and he was quietly removed from its official channels.

A mural featuring Jenas alongside BBC Sport colleagues Lineker, Alan Shearer and Alex Scott has been removed from the broadcaster’s MediaCityUK headquarters in Salford, Manchester, the Sun added.

This month the governing board of the BBC confirmed plans for an independent review of its workplace culture, citing concerns about “the potential for inappropriate workplace behaviour, particularly in creative and editorial environments”.

The review will “make recommendations on practical steps that could strengthen a workplace culture in line with BBC values”, it said.

Jenas, a married father of four, covered this summer’s European Championship and commented on Spain’s semi-final victory over France on 9 July. He last presented The One Show alongside Alex Jones on 22 July.

He appeared on the Match of the Day panel on 4 May but was absent from Saturday’s first episode of the new season.

According to official figures published last year, Jenas – who is also employed by TNT Sports – was paid between £190,000 and £194,999 by the BBC.

Fire chiefs call for help with extreme weather duty

Robyn Vinter

Fire chiefs are calling for more support to respond to extreme weather events such as flooding and wildfires in England.

The National Fire Chiefs Council (NFCC) has urged ministers to impose a statutory duty to respond to severe weather-related incidents in order to ensure there was the right equipment, training and budget to deal with them.

The NFCC said England needed to be brought into line with the rest of the UK, where this was already in place, so that the predicted increase in severe weather incidents could be tackled “in a coordinated and effective way” in the future.

Storm Lilian is expected to bring heavy rain with potential gusts of up to 80mph over the bank holiday weekend. Travel disruption, flooding, power cuts and dangerous conditions near coastal areas are all likely, meteorologists say.

South-west Scotland and the Aberdeenshire coast face yellow weather warnings for rain today. A third yellow warning for wind also covers the north of England.

Lilian would be a demonstration of the extreme weather the UK can expect to see more of due to climate breakdown. More than 6 million people in the UK are already at significant risk of flooding, according to estimates from the UK Health Security Agency, and the number is expected to rise to between 9.8 million and 13.3 million by 2050.

The NFCC’s chair, Mark Hardingham, said this was one reason why it was important to give fire services greater control over tackling extreme weather events. “In the UK, we experienced heatwaves in 2022, which saw wildfires [affect] urban areas on a scale not seen before, and last year Storm Babet saw hundreds of homes and businesses flooded and seven people lose their lives,” he said.

He added: “The absence of a statutory duty to respond to flooding and inland water incidents in England challenges our ability to ensure our services are prepared ... We would like to see the government consult on introducing these changes to the legal framework, but with core budgets already under significant strain, any revisions to our statutory obligations must be met with adequate funding.”

“With risks around extreme weather increasing, we need better data collection to help us develop our response and work efficiently with other agencies.”

National
GCSE results

GCSEs results shake off pandemic, but concern grows over 'attainment gap'

Continued from page 1

this again, and students, employers and educators can be confident in these results."

Catherine McKinnell, the schools minister for England, said: "While this is a moment to celebrate, I am deeply concerned about the inequalities in our education system, with where you live and what type of school you attend still being too big an influence on your opportunities."

"Our review of the curriculum will break down barriers and ensure art, sport, music and drama are no longer the preserve of a privileged few."

The proportion of private school pupils awarded top grades increased to 48.4% of entries with grade 7 or higher, up from 48.1% in 2018-19 before the pandemic.

Overall, the top grade 9 was awarded to 5.1% of the more than 5m courses taken by 16-year-olds

in England, a fraction better than in 2023. The proportion awarded 7 or higher – equivalent to an A – was 22.6%, up from 22.4% in 2023 and 21.8% in 2019, one of the highest rates seen outside the pandemic years. In 2021, when grades were at their highest, 30% of GCSEs received a grade 7 or above.

In England, 1,270 students received straight 9 grades in all of

1,270

The number of GCSE students in England who received straight 9 grades in all of their subjects

48.4%

The proportion of private school pupils awarded top grades of 7 or higher, up from 48.1% pre-Covid

their subjects, 65% of whom were girls, while 145 received 9s in 11 or more GCSE courses taken. Girls aged 16 gained 25.5% of grades 7 and higher in England, compared with 19.8% for boys. The gap between the two narrowed slightly by 0.1 of a percentage point, compared with 2023.

The proportion of year 11 pupils achieving a grade 4 and above in English and maths fell slightly, meaning more students will retake the subjects while in post-16 education.

In Wales and Northern Ireland, regulators opted for a more gentle progression from the higher awards made by teacher assessment during 2020 and 2021, when no formal exams were held. England largely returned to pre-pandemic grading last year.

As a result, the proportion of A*s and As awarded to 16-year-olds in Northern Ireland dropped from 35.1% to 31%, and Cs or above from 87% to 82.4%. In Wales, the top A* and A grades for 16-year-olds dipped from 22% in 2023 to 19.4%, and the proportion of Cs from 65.6% to 63.2%, which was lower than in 2019.

Sir Peter Lampl, founder of the educational charity the Sutton Trust, said: "It is concerning that the gap in attainment between private and state schools has widened this year. This reflects a broader pattern of widening gaps between the most and least well-off young people since the pandemic and cost of living crisis."

"The stubborn regional disparities in attainment are unchanged. London continues to outperform the rest of the country, and the North East is still the region with the lowest level of top grades. To close these gaps we need sustained investment in teaching, particularly in areas with lower attainment."

Lynne Neagle, cabinet secretary for education in Wales, said: "This year is our final step back towards pre-pandemic exam arrangements and today's results are where we expected them to be with outcomes similar to 2019. I would also like to thank our teachers and education workforce who have worked incredibly hard to support learners to succeed."

Education funding and policy is devolved to national governments, with substantial variations in GCSE exam structure and course content that make direct comparisons between jurisdictions difficult. Scotland has a different qualifications system and most students received their results earlier this month.

Pepe Di'Isio, the general secretary of the Association of School and College Leaders, congratulated pupils but said: "This is not the story in England for a significant proportion of students who fall short of achieving at least a grade 4 GCSE pass in English and maths, and so will be consigned to a remorseless treadmill of resits in post-16 education under rules drawn up by the last government."



Analysis Ingrained inequality deepens post-Covid

Richard Adams
Alex Clark

As the tide of exam results affected by Covid recedes, it reveals stark social and regional inequalities in GCSE performances across England that are barely changed or worse than before the pandemic struck.

Those receiving their GCSE results this week were in their first year of secondary school when the pandemic began in early 2020, with that year and the next hugely disrupted as a result.

Ofqual and the Department for Education have reset their clocks to pre-pandemic grades, but the echoes remain among the results achieved by those from disadvantaged families, and especially those pupils who were unable to gain the grade 4 minimum in English and maths and



must now resit those subjects while they remain in education for the next two years.

London continues to outperform the rest of the country, and the north-east still has the lowest level of top grades, though there was a minimal closing of the gap between the two. More worrying, all regions recorded a fall in the rates getting grade 4 or above. The West Midlands, which had the lowest rate in 2023, has fallen the most.

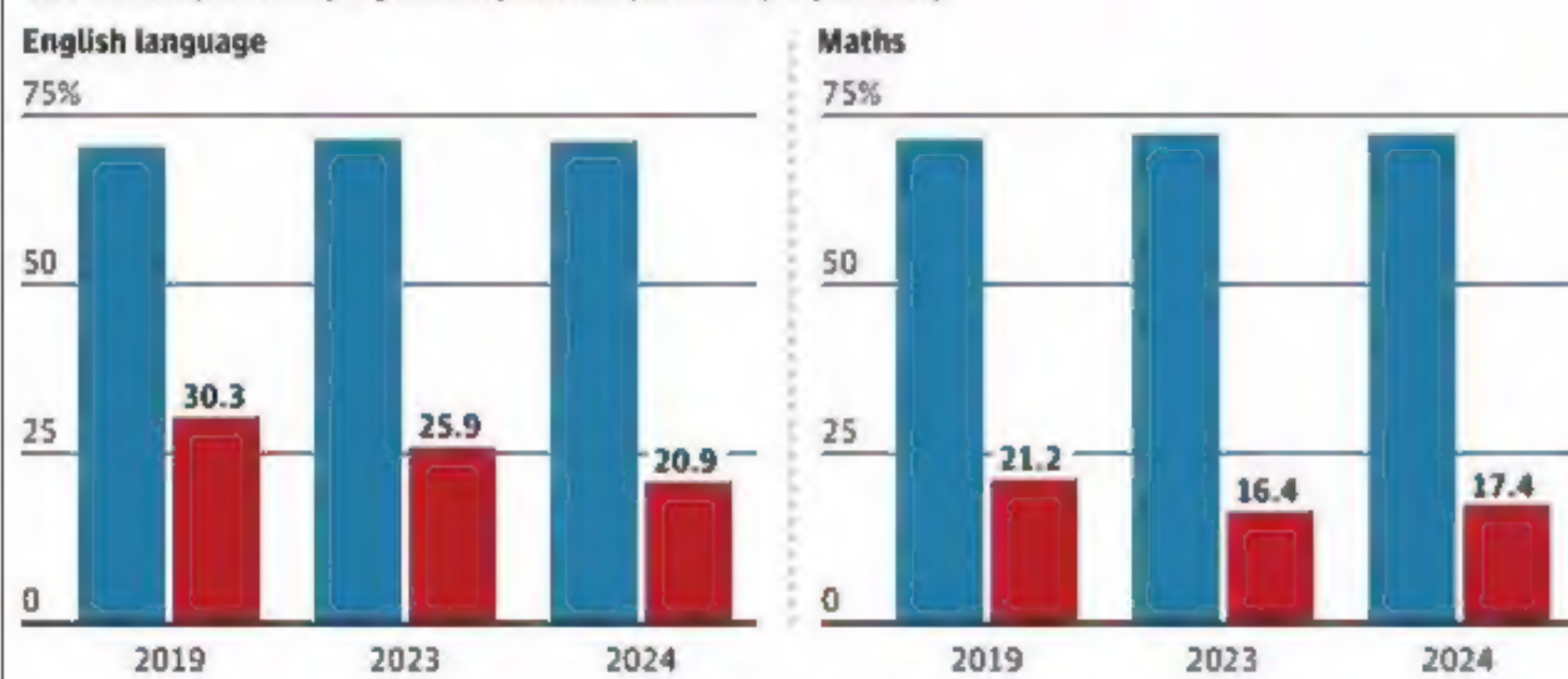
The education secretary, Bridget Phillipson, has rightly condemned the "unacceptable, entrenched regional disparities we have seen time and time again".

Recent research has found wider variations in grades within individual towns or cities than between the north and south of country. Not all schools in London and the south-east are high performers, and not all in the north-east or West Midlands are low performers.

Louis Hodge, an associate

Pass rates for English language resits have declined

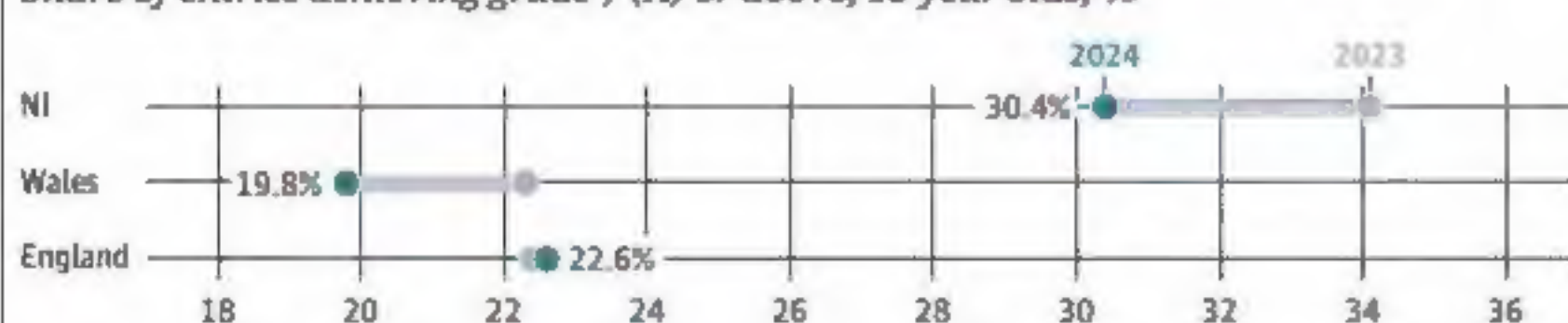
First-time pass rate (16 year olds) Resit pass rate (17 year olds)



Source: Joint Council for Qualifications

The share of top grades has fallen in Northern Ireland and Wales, but remained stable in England

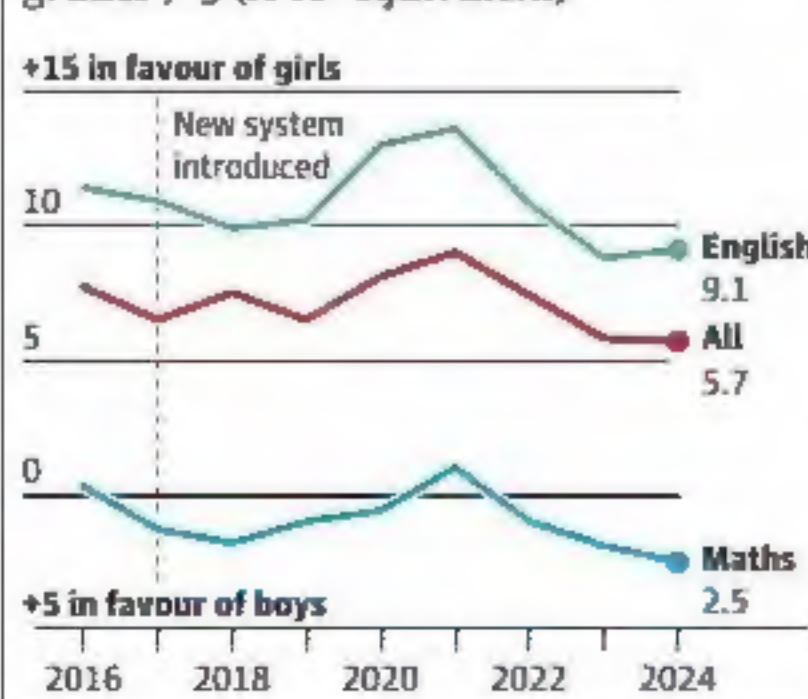
Share of entries achieving grade 7 (A) or above, 16 year olds, %



Source: Joint Council for Qualifications

The attainment gap between boys and girls has dropped to its lowest level since the new GCSE system was introduced

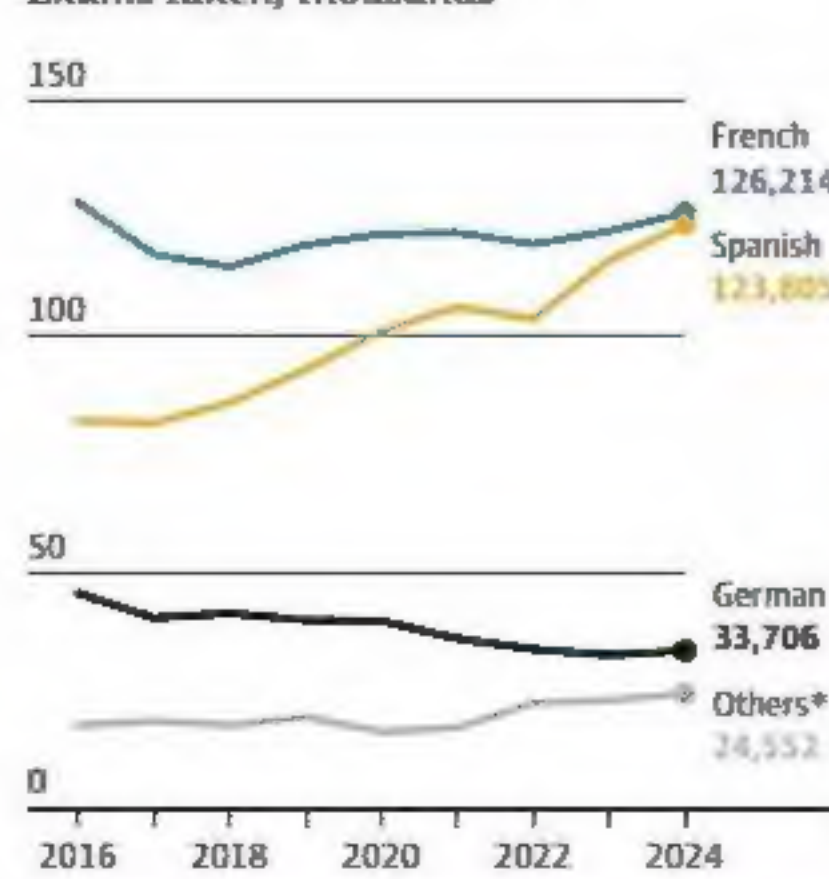
Percentage point difference in attaining grades 7-9 (A-A* equivalent)



Source: Joint Council for Qualifications. Base: 16-year-olds in England sitting GCSEs

Spanish GCSE has increased in popularity

Exams taken, thousands



Source: Joint Council for Qualifications. Base: 16-year-olds in England sitting GCSEs. *Other modern languages

▼ Students congratulating each other on their GCSE results at the City of London academy, Southwark

PHOTOGRAPH: LEON NEAL/GETTY IMAGES



▲ Poppy Chance, left, and Sara Wolska-Anjum jump for joy after opening their results at St Anne's Catholic school in Southampton

PHOTOGRAPH: OLLIE THOMPSON/SOLENT NEWS

director at the Education Policy Institute, said it was important to remember the difficulties today's students had faced after austerity and the pandemic. "Amongst them are the high levels of pupil absence, geographical inequalities and a growing attainment gap between pupils from low-income backgrounds and their peers - equivalent to 19 months of learning by the time they sit their GCSEs," he said.

Detailed analysis is not yet available, but this year's figures show that 60% of entries from grammar schools - which educate few disadvantaged children - received the top grades of 7 and above, while the figure for non-selective schools in grammar school areas fell this year, with just 12.6% getting top grades.

Private schools, which possibly educate even fewer disadvantaged children than grammars, had 48% of entries at 7 and above, up by nearly a percentage point on 2023.

At academies the rate was 21%, and comprehensives 19%.

Sir Peter Lampl, the founder of the Sutton Trust, which campaigns to reduce educational inequality, said: "It is concerning that the gap in attainment between private and state schools has widened this year. This reflects a broader pattern of widening gaps between the most and least well-off young people."

Away from the top grades, the proportion of 16-year-old pupils getting a grade 4 or above in English fell 0.6 percentage points to 71.2%, and in maths the proportion fell from 72.3% to 72%. As a result, more pupils aged 17 and over will have resits next year. But their chances of success are likely to be worse than before the pandemic, based on this year's results, with just 20.9% of English grades for 17-year-olds at 4 or above. That's below the 25.9% recorded for resits in 2023 and well below the pre-pandemic figure of 30.3% in 2019.

GCSE grade 4s in English and maths open the doors to many future qualifications and careers.

Cath Sezen, the director of education policy at the Association of Colleges, said: "We do need to question whether there is a better approach for the 100,000 students who sat English and maths and weren't successful in achieving a grade 4 or above. Up and down the country there will be teachers and heads of English and maths at a loss about what more they can do to shift the dial, while under pressure to provide English and maths teaching in the 2024-25 academic year to increasing cohorts of young people."

'I'm so grateful' Ukrainian's double delight

A Ukrainian teenager who escaped the devastation of war in his homeland is celebrating "excellent" GCSE results after also earning the equivalent in his own country.

Oles Kuzomko fled Kyiv and came to the UK with his mother, Mila, in May 2022 while his father, Roman, remained in Ukraine.

The 16-year-old relocated to Silsden, near Bradford in West Yorkshire, and gained an assisted place at Bradford Grammar School (BGS).

He is celebrating achieving 10 GCSEs, including three 8s, five 7s and two 6s. Oles also took online exams and earned the Ukrainian Certificate of Secondary Education - the country's equivalent to GCSEs - all while adapting to a new language, culture and educational system.

Oles and Mila had relocated to Yorkshire through the UK's Homes for Ukraine programme after initially seeking refuge in a rural village near Kyiv, then moving to Poland and later to the Czech Republic.

During his studies, Oles lost not only his father but also his grandfather and great-grandfather in a short period. His father died from sepsis last June.

The events left Oles with no immediate family in Ukraine, and he was not able to return to attend their funerals. Oles said: "I don't have anyone left in Ukraine. The UK has become my home, and I see my future here. It's where I want to build my life and continue my education."

Oles was awarded a scholarship by BGS for his GCSE studies, with the assisted place later extended to cover his A-level education.

He said: "I'm really proud of my physics and biology grades and I'm so grateful to BGS, especially the teachers who have helped me."

He now plans to study A-level psychology, business and history at BGS, and take the extended project qualification, which is worth half an A-level, with aspirations to enter law or management.

Oles's mother praised his hard work and commitment to his studies. She said: "Moving to a new country, leaving behind everything familiar and dealing with the personal loss of our loved ones has been tough. But seeing Oles achieve his results has made it all worthwhile."

PA Media



▲ Oles Kuzomko with his sister, Yaryna, and his mother, Mila



▲ Grace Elder, 16, who got 8s in English, biology and psychology, said she had struggled to come back to school after the Covid lockdowns

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTOPHER THOMOND/THE GUARDIAN

'I'm really proud' Big day for students who coped with lockdown in year 7

Hannah Al-Othman
North of England correspondent

For 16-year-old Thomas O'Mahoney, Wednesday night was a sleepless one. With hours to go until he collected his GCSE results, he strategised about what he would do with hypothetical sets of grades.

In the end, when he received his white envelope yesterday morning at Sandymoor Ormiston academy in Runcorn, Cheshire, he had scooped a lot of 7s and 8s.

"I'm really happy," he said. "Relieved, definitely relieved. I spent the whole night last night weighing up options, what could have come of it, and when the grade boundaries came out at 8am this morning I was already checking online."

Now he is off to college to study A-levels - he has not decided which ones yet - and has an ultimate goal of pursuing a career in finance.

For Grace Elder, 16, one of the most challenging things about GCSEs was spending this summer waiting for the results. "The buildup was tense, I won't lie, it was the waiting game that I struggled with," she said. "I was like: I just need those numbers now."

When the wait was finally over, she received 8s in her two English subjects, biology and psychology, and several 7s. But it was the 6 in maths and statistics that she was most delighted with, having hoped for a 4 or a 5.

Grace will next take A-levels in English literature, psychology and law, and hopes to pursue a career in criminal psychology.

"I'm really, really proud," she said. "It's been difficult ... I found coming back after Covid the hardest - I was out of school for a bit - but I think this has just proved to me that even though I've had struggles, I'm still me, I can still do it. I just needed this."

She added: "Everyone is always saying it's just a number on a piece of paper, which is true, but I can see my whole school journey in this."

This cohort of students were in year 7 when the country locked down owing to Covid-19.

"It's definitely been a struggle

'I'm feeling really positive ... the kids have done me proud'

Sally Jones
Principal

with going out in Covid," said Sophie Grice, 16, "because I've gone from primary school to year 7 to lockdown completely."

"It was hard to get back into school for me, but the teachers definitely, and one teacher in particular, helped me through everything. The teachers here are dead supportive."

Despite the challenges, the effort has paid off and she is going to study animal management at college. "It went better than I expected, to be honest," she said. "I've hit most of my predicted grades and some of them I've gone over with."

As pupils turned up to collect their results, many with their parents in tow, there were hugs, screams - and a few tears. Some ripped open their envelopes straight away, while others clutched them while waiting for friends - or took them home to open in private.

Evelyn Carroll, 16, is off to the Fowler football academy in Liverpool. After an anxious morning, she was delighted to have passed everything, with a distinction in PE.

"I've been dead nervous, but excited. I've been eager to find out the results," she said. "I was really nervous because I needed some 6s to get into college, and I've got them, so I'm happy now."

Sandymoor Ormiston academy is a small school, with a cohort of only about 120 pupils a year. Year 11 pupils take GCSEs or BTECs, with a roughly 70/30 breakdown in favour of GCSEs. In 2018 the school was rated as inadequate by Ofsted but in April it was graded up to good.

The principal, Sally Jones, who took over the running of the school in 2018, said: "I'm feeling really, really positive. There's a really bright future for Sandymoor. The kids have done me proud, absolutely."

Police launch investigation after man is killed by his pet XL bully

Nadeem Badshah

Police have launched an investigation after a man was killed by his own XL bully dog in Lancashire.

Officers were called to reports of a dog attacking someone inside a house



in Accrington shortly before 9.30pm on Tuesday, Lancashire police said.

David Daintree, 53, the owner of the dog who lived at the address on Ashley Court, was found dead at the scene.

The dog, since confirmed to be the banned breed, was shot by armed police officers to stop it from injuring more people as it continued to pose

David Daintree was killed by his XL bully at his home in Lancashire this week. The dogs are illegal to own in England without an exemption

"a significant threat of serious harm", the force said. Specially trained officers are supporting Daintree's family.

Supt Marie Jackson said: "This is a tragic incident which has sadly resulted in a man losing his life and my thoughts are with his loved ones at this time. An investigation into the circumstances is ongoing and I would appeal to anyone with any information to get in touch."

"We will have extra officers in the area carrying out inquiries and I would urge anyone with information or concerns to speak to them."

In February, it became illegal to own an American XL bully dog in England and Wales without a certificate of exemption. Similar legislation came into effect in Scotland at the beginning of August.

In Northern Ireland, it became illegal to breed, sell, exchange, gift or abandon an XL bully-type dog last month. Owners must also ensure their dog is muzzled and on a lead when in public places. From 31 December, it will become illegal to own an American XL bully without an exemption in Northern Ireland.

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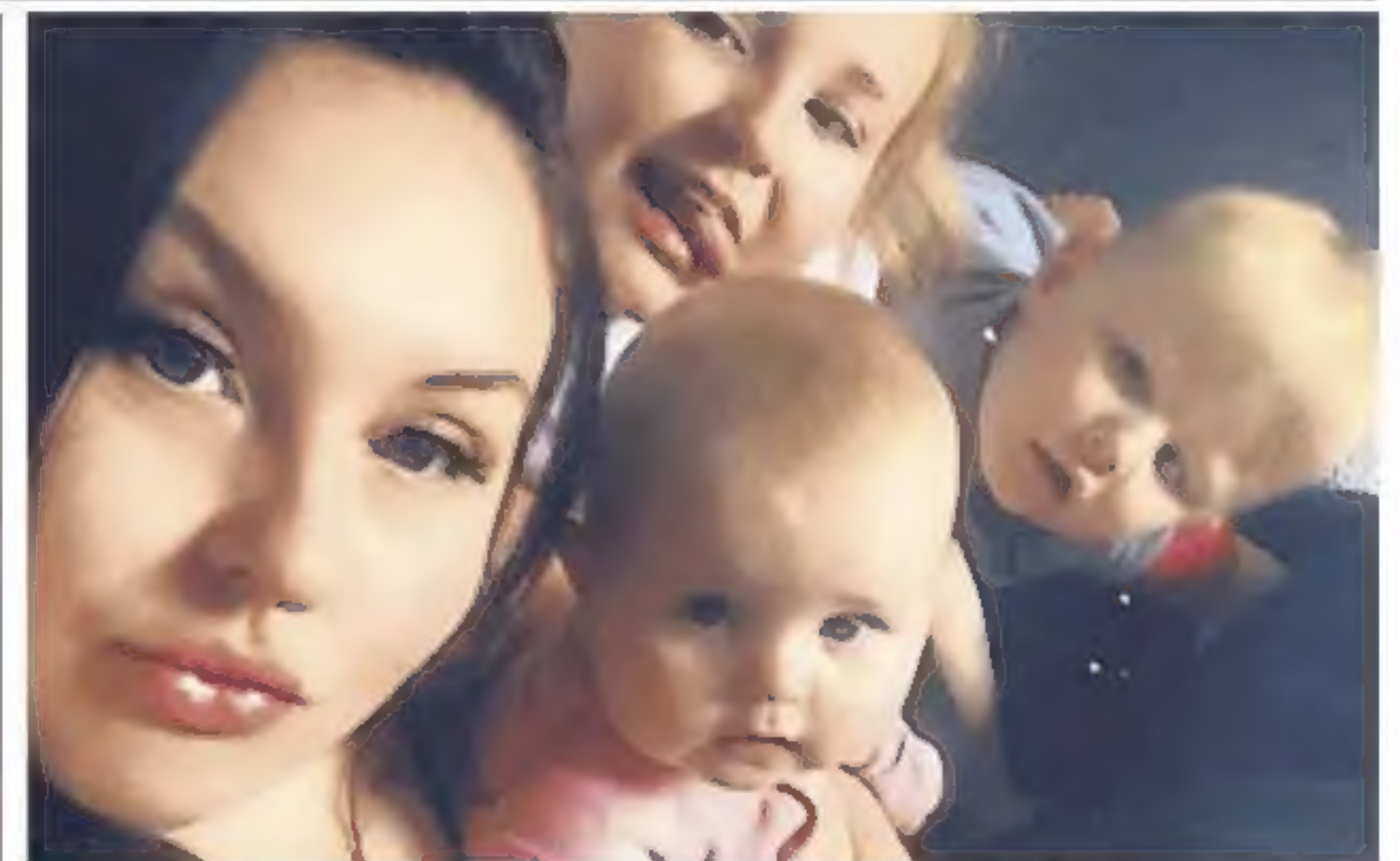
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Bryonie Gawith, 29, died in the arson attack along with her daughters Aubree, 22 months, Denisty, 9, and son, Oscar, 5 PHOTOGRAPH: FACEBOOK/UNIPIX

'A profound loss': family pays tribute to Bradford fire victims

Cash Boyle
Josh Halliday

The family of a woman and her three children who were killed in a house fire in Bradford have spoken of their "profound loss".

Bryonie Gawith, 29, died along with 22-month-old Aubree, Denisty, nine, and Oscar, five, after a fire at their home at about 2am on Wednesday.

In a statement released yesterday, Gawith's family said they were "still trying to comprehend what has happened".

"No words can describe how we are feeling and no words could ever make up for the profound loss we are now faced with," they said. "We are overwhelmed and grateful for all the support and kind words we are receiving, but we ask as a family if we can be given respect and privacy so we can try to come to terms with the unimaginable sadness and grief of this tragic loss."

Jonathan Birtle, 34, the children's father, said: "I loved them with all my heart and if I had the chance, I would take their place in a heartbeat."

"I cannot imagine life without them. They will never be forgotten and will always be in my heart."

Gawith was estranged from Birtle.

He is on remand in custody after being charged with strangling Gawith and stealing her phone at her home on 27 July. Birtle has previously indicated that he would plead not guilty to the offences. He is next due to appear in court on Tuesday.

Birtle is not being treated as a suspect in the house fire.

West Yorkshire police said the incident on Wednesday is believed to be "domestic related" and confirmed a 39-year-old man arrested on suspicion of murder is in a critical condition in hospital. He is the ex-partner of a woman who was visiting the family.

The force said it had visited the address last month over an unrelated matter and would not be making a referral to the Independent Office for Police Conduct.

Supt Lucy Leadbeater of West Yorkshire police earlier said the incident was "absolutely devastating".

She added: "Early inquiries show that the fire was started deliberately, and we have arrested one man on suspicion of murder. He is seriously ill in hospital today as a result of injuries caused by the fire."

"While our inquiries are at an early stage, we do at this time believe the incident is domestic related. We are appealing to anyone who was in the area at the time ... or who has CCTV or doorbell footage to come forward."

Flowers, teddy bears and cards were left at one end of the police cordon on Wednesday afternoon.

One card read: "Have fun in heaven. We will miss you." Another said: "RIP to my beautiful auntie and baby cousins. I love you all, all this world and more."

Neighbours described how they rushed into the street when they were woken by the "intense" smell of smoke and sound of sirens. Lindsay Pearson, 56, said she saw "a big flame - like the sky was all lit up".

'It should be in a museum': postcard sent 121 years ago arrives at Swansea address

Sammy Gecsoyler

In the age of next-day deliveries and speedy shipping from all corners of the world, the days of waiting around for a letter or package were thought to be over. In Swansea however, staff at a building society were taken aback after receiving a postcard that was delivered 121 years late.

The card is believed to date back to 1903 but was only recently received by staff at Swansea Building Society in Cradock Street.

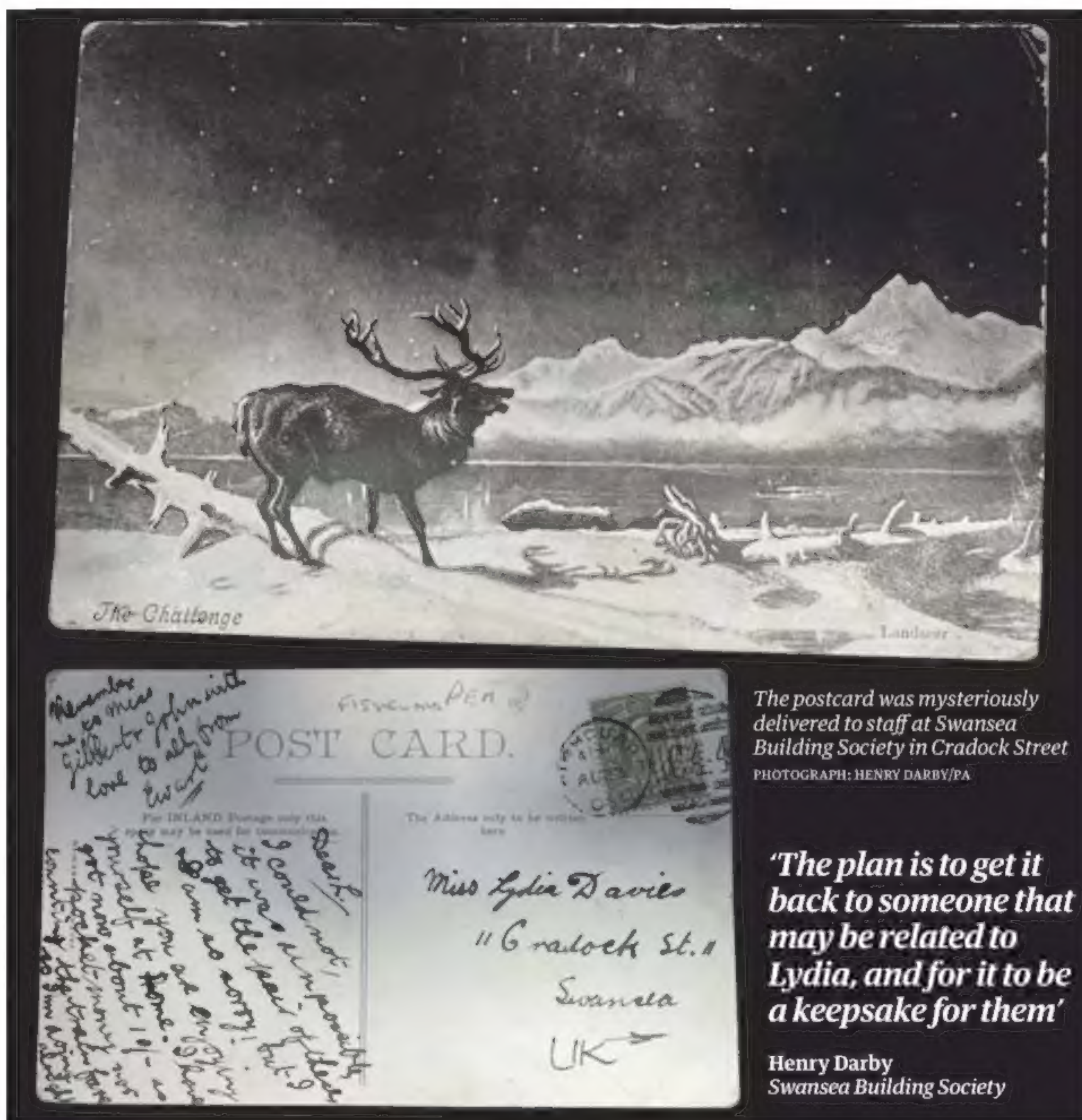
The addressee, Lydia Davies, is believed to have lived on the street more than a century ago and would have been 16 when she was supposed to receive the card.

Printed on the postcard is a work by the 19th century English animal painter Edwin Henry Landseer titled *The Challenge*, which shows a stag standing in the snow on the bank of a body of water by snowy mountains.

Henry Darby, the building society's marketing and communications officer, said how the postcard ended up at his workplace remained a mystery, but that he hoped to find those related either to Davies or the sender, Ewart.

"We can put out a nice little post and see if anyone knows any more about Miss Lydia, or maybe what life was like on Cradock Street 121 years ago," Darby said. "The plan is to get it back to someone that may be related to Lydia, and for it to be a keepsake for them that they can pass on for generations to come."

Darby was surprised by the discovery because the postcard arrived "not in a separate envelope, not with



The postcard was mysteriously delivered to staff at Swansea Building Society in Cradock Street
PHOTOGRAPH: HENRY DARBY/PA

'The plan is to get it back to someone that may be related to Lydia, and for it to be a keepsake for them'

Henry Darby
Swansea Building Society

a note" on 16 August. "It's definitely changed my week," he said.

The postcard is written in black, joined-up handwriting and has a green halfpenny stamp featuring the portrait of Edward VII, who reigned from 1901 to 1910.

Darby said census records from 1901 suggested Davies lived on the street with her parents and five siblings. He said proving who could be related to her may be tricky because the surname is common in Wales.

He said the census revealed Davies married a man from London who "owned a hotel in Pall Mall, so potentially Lydia's family might not be local to Swansea any more".

Darby said staff at the building society had "no concept of how it actually ended up back here".

"No one's come forward to say, 'Yeah, I found that in an antique shop' or 'I found that in a book', 'I found it in the charity shop and I just put it in the postbox'," he said. "That's the one kind of spooky element, that we're still not sure how it came back to be here at 11 Cradock Street."

The postcard remains on Darby's desk, but he feels it should be in a museum. "Swansea Building Society is 101 years old, so it's quite strange to hold a piece of card that is 20 years older than the society," he said. "It really does feel like it should be in a museum, or in an archive."

Staff and social media users have helped to decipher the postcard, in which Ewart told "L" they were "so sorry" because they had trouble finding a "pair" of an unspecified item.

Ewart wrote: "I hope you're enjoying yourself at home," before saying he had about 10 shillings "as pocket money, not counting the train fare so I'm doing alright".

A Royal Mail spokesperson cast doubt on whether the postcard had been circulating in the company's system for more than 100 years: "It is likely that this postcard was put back into our system. When an item is in our system, we are under obligation to deliver it to the correct address."

Lump of gel that plays video game Pong is able to improve its scores through 'memory'

Nicola Davis

Science correspondent

Researchers have discovered that a soft and squidgy water-rich gel is not only able to play the video game Pong but gets better at it over time.

The findings come almost two years after brain cells in a dish were taught how to play that 1970s classic, an outcome the researchers involved said showed "something that resembles intelligence".

The team behind the latest study said they were not claiming their hydrogel was sentient.

"We are claiming that it has memory, and through that memory it can improve in performance by gaining experience," said Dr Vincent Strong, from the University of Reading, and first author of the research. He said the work could offer a simpler way

to develop algorithms for neural networks - models that underpin AI systems including Chat GPT. He noted that at present they were based on how biological structures worked.

Released in 1972 Pong was one of the first video games and has a simple premise: two paddles on a court can be moved up and down to hit a ball back and forth between them. The longer the rally, the higher the score.

Strong's study focused on a single-player version in which a paddle is moved along one wall of a court to keep a ball bouncing around.

In the journal *Cell Reports Physical Science*, he and his colleagues describe how they sandwiched an electroactive polymer hydrogel between two plates, each bearing a 3x3 array of electrodes that were hooked up to a computer system that simulated Pong. Six of the electrode pairs, in a 3x2 arrangement, were

stimulated to represent the movement of the ball.

Across the other three electrode pairs - representing the wall along which the paddle was located - the team applied a small voltage, measuring the current with sensors. The hydrogel used in the experiment contained charged ions, which moved in response to electrical stimulation and lingered where they ended up. The point along the "wall" with the highest current could shift as the ball moved, meaning the paddle could change position.

"At the beginning the ions were

equally and randomly distributed, so the paddle hit and missed the ball," said Strong.

But as the ball moved around the court, the gel received more and more electrical stimulation.

"Over time the ion concentrations increase where the ball is most, acting like a kind of muscle memory - as with the higher concentrations there are higher electric current readings and the paddle is able to act more accurately," said Strong.

In other words the paddle is able to hit the ball more often, resulting in longer rallies. "Our research shows

that even very simple materials can exhibit complex, adaptive, behaviours typically associated with living systems or sophisticated AI," said Dr Yoshikatsu Hayashi, another author of the research, who is at the University of Reading.

Dr Brett Kagan, the chief scientific officer at Cortical Labs, who worked on the Pong-playing brain cells but was not involved in the latest study, said the hydrogel system demonstrated a basic form of memory similar to the way a riverbed recorded a memory of the river.

That finding, he said, could be useful in understanding how changes within a medium might help electrical signals travel through it better.

But he said significantly more work would be needed to show that hydrogels could "learn".

Kagan said: "The performance and the improvement was tied to a specific location of stimulation. When this was changed in any way the system was not able to reorganise [and] still show performance. This is different to our tests [conducted] in neural systems where we showed that regardless of how you presented the information learning still occurred."



Pong, a 1970s video game, now played by memory gel in a glove, below
PHOTOGRAPH: SSPL/GETTY



▼ Rachel Reeves visits a Torus rent-to-buy housing scheme under construction in Liverpool

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTOPHER THOMOND/GUARDIAN



Government will not give public sector workers blank cheque over pay, says Reeves

Continued from page 1

for the first time in a decade police officers, the armed forces and teachers would get an above-inflation pay rise. "There are massive recruitment and retention problems across the armed forces, teaching and the NHS," she said. The cost of not increasing pay in line with the recommendations of pay review bodies would have been "very damaging".

Some public sector unions have been pressing for "pay restoration" that would award above-inflation deals to public sector workers to

make up for a decade of cuts. "Keir Starmer and I decide our policy not the trade unions. There are no blank cheques," the chancellor said.

Reeves has also been under pressure from anti-poverty campaigners and some Labour MPs to scrap the two-child benefit cap, but would give no commitment about when or whether she would do so.

"There is an awful lot of stuff we wouldn't have done but it is not possible to reverse 14 years of damage in one budget. We have huge problems. We can't do everything people want us to do or that we would like to do."



The chancellor strongly rejected the idea that she was repeating the same austerity programme imposed by George Osborne when he arrived at the Treasury in 2010. "I have just given the first real terms pay increase to public sector workers in 10 years. That's not austerity."

Reeves said her tough budget had been forced on her by the poor state of the public finances. "I sometimes think George Osborne relished the opportunity to shrink the state and to make cuts. I don't feel any of that relish".

One likely budget change involves



◀ Striking hospital doctors outside last year's Conservative conference in Manchester

PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTOPHER THOMOND/GUARDIAN

▶ George Osborne, whom Reeves accused of probably having relished the opportunity to impose austerity on the country as Tory chancellor

It is not possible to reverse 14 years of damage in one budget. We have huge problems. We can't do everything people want us to do'

Rachel Reeves
Chancellor

the government's debt rule. At present the rule - which says public debt should be falling as a proportion of national income within five years - includes payments to indemnify losses made by the Bank of England on its bond buying operations.

Economists have said removing the Bank from the debt definition would allow Reeves to borrow up to £20bn more each year.

The chancellor said she considered the debt rule less important than her other measure of financial sustainability - that day to day state spending should be covered by tax

Council audit Unions query Birmingham's bankruptcy as public inquiry demanded

Jessica Murray
Midlands correspondent

Politicians in Birmingham have called for council cuts, thought to be the biggest in local authority history, to be halted or scaled back over concerns the council's financial crisis might have been overstated.

Birmingham city council is planning to make £300m in savings and sell assets worth £750m before April 2026 after issuing a section 114 notice, in effect declaring bankruptcy, in September last year.

There are concerns, however, that the council does not have a clear picture of its financial situation, and that proposed cuts are based on potentially inaccurate data.

This week a report from the Audit Reform Lab, at the University of Sheffield, commissioned by the Unite, Unison and GMB trade unions, said: "Cuts and asset sales were progressed in a context of uncertainty around the quality of financial information used to justify these interventions."

It concluded that the council's financial problems were attributed to a "prematurely disclosed and potentially overstated" equal-pay claim liability of £760m that "remains speculative and unaudited". The report found cuts were pushed through with "little public consultation" under "statutory direction", and would probably lead to "cost spirals and worsening outcomes for the city".

Laurence Turner, the Labour MP for Birmingham Northfield, said "serious consideration" should be given to spreading the cuts over a longer time frame, and called for a public inquiry to find out what had happened at the council.

Turner said: "The speed this is happening is a real concern. With libraries, for instance, the loss of buildings and specialist staff would take years to recover. Some council services are being cut by 50%. The worry is making these cuts now is just shoring up problems for the future."

"There are serious questions that need to be answered by the people

involved in issuing that section 114 notice, and the external auditors ... the approach being taken [to cuts] should be reassessed."

Ayoub Khan, the independent MP for Birmingham Perry Barr, said pausing the budget cuts was "not only necessary but what any responsible organisation would do".

He said: "Given the irreparable impact these cuts are already having it is imperative to ensure the council has a clear, precise, financial picture. Essential services are being drastically reduced, disproportionately affecting vulnerable adults and children. Worse, taxpayer-funded assets are being sold off on a large scale, possibly at a loss."

The council sparked anger this month by agreeing to sell off a Perry Barr housing development, initially designed for the 2022 Commonwealth Games, at a loss to the council of more than £300m.

"Adding further insult to injury,

residents are now being told the situation was not as severe as initially portrayed," Khan said, adding "a full public inquiry" was needed and calling on the government to bail out the council from its "self-inflicted financial assault".

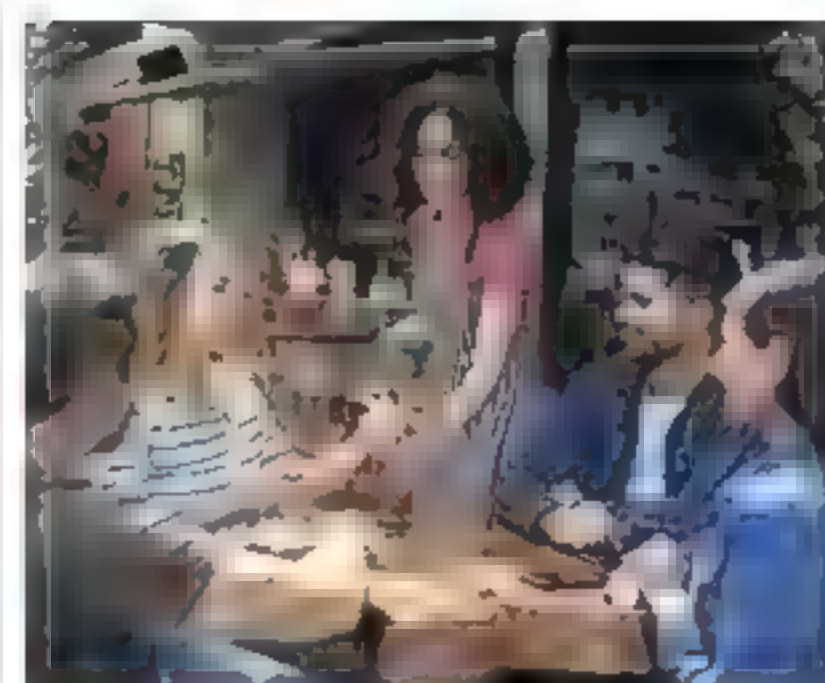
The Audit Reform Lab report raised questions about how the last Conservative government handled its response to the financial crisis in Birmingham, questioning why commissioners were brought in so quickly without a "best value assessment".

Turner said the former levelling up secretary, Michael Gove, was too hasty in his decision to send commissioners to the council to make cuts and rebalance the budget. "We know Gove leapt straight into the most severe form of intervention. Decisions made about Birmingham were politicised. We could see during the general election campaign the Conservatives spent a large amount of time hammering Labour for what happened in Birmingham."

John Cotton, leader of Birmingham city council, said: "We must take responsibility for the failings that have contributed to our current difficulties, but the mistakes made in Birmingham have not occurred in a vacuum. Report after report shows there's a national crisis in local government caused by 14 years of neglect from the previous Tory government, combined with major rises in demand and cost-led pressures."

A spokesperson for the Ministry of Housing, Communities and Local Government said: "We are working with commissioners in Birmingham city council on the challenges faced at the authority, and returning it to financial stability."

"Ministers have met the leader and deputy leader of the council, and the commissioners, to discuss the progress being made there."



▲ Supporters of a mobility deal say it would help address shortages of workers in sectors such as hospitality

EU mobility UK ministers rule out deal for under-30s

Peter Walker
Lisa O'Carroll

Ministers have reiterated their opposition to any deal with Brussels allowing young people to live and work in EU countries, after a report said some elements of this could be agreed as part of a wider set of negotiations.

On Wednesday the Times cited unnamed government sources as saying UK ministers accepted they would have to "give ground" over parts of a proposed mutual youth mobility system if they were to get agreement in other areas, such as a reduction in checks on UK food entering the EU.

"If we are serious about resetting relations with the EU then we need to be prepared to give them some of the things that they want," the source told the paper.

But a government spokesperson said this was not being looked at. "We are not considering it. There are no plans for this, or any work being done on it," they said. "Our negotiating team has very clear red lines, and none of the preparatory work involves this."

While Labour has been adamant it will never oversee a return to the free movement of people, the idea of a youth mobility scheme - which would allow EU citizens under 30 to work and study for a fixed period in the UK, and vice versa - would be more similar to deals the UK has with countries such as Australia.

In April, the EU made a formal offer to negotiate a bloc-wide youth mobility programme, but this was immediately rejected by both Labour and Rishi Sunak, the Conservative prime minister at the time.

An apparent obstacle to the EU proposal is the element that would allow UK and EU students to have home-fee status again at each others' universities for four years.

The Liberal Democrats called yesterday for the government to agree a mutual youth-based system.

Layla Moran, the party's foreign affairs spokesperson, said this would rebuild ties with the EU and "give our young people fantastic opportunities to live and work across Europe, while also providing a much-needed boost to the UK economy - especially our hospitality sector".



▲ Birmingham's athletes' village, built for the 2002 Commonwealth Games, is now to be sold, losing the council £300m PHOTOGRAPH: CHRISTOPHER FURLONG/GETTY

receipts. "We will set out the precise way to measure debt in the budget in October. It is reasonable for the government to borrow to invest."

Reeves justified last month's decision to scrap road, rail and hospital projects on the grounds that the previous government hadn't allocated the funds for them.

"You can't deliver projects on the never-never. I am not going to make pledges without saying where the money is coming from."

Growth has been strong in the first two quarters of 2024 but Reeves said: "The growth numbers are what they are but they don't reverse all the damage that has been done."

"The big challenge is the public finances. Are we spending more than we are bringing in? Are the public finances on a trajectory consistent with the stability we need as a country to pay our way in the world? And if we carry on like this they won't be."

The chancellor said slow growth was the reason taxes were at their highest for 70 years and public services are on their knees. A "couple of quarters of growth after a recession" didn't change the underlying picture.

"I am going to have to take difficult decisions. I don't relish them but I am ready for them."

"I will do what it takes to put the public finances on a firmer footing. My job as chancellor is to make sure the sums add up."

TUC meeting Push for restoration of spending power

Unions are to push the government for "pay restoration" deals that would award above-inflation pay rises to public sector workers who have suffered a decade of real-terms salary cuts.

Members gathering for the Trades Union Congress's annual meeting next month are due to vote on a motion that calls for pay restoration to be "a key feature of our campaigning with the new government", the final agenda for the event shows.

The current holder of the TUC's revolving presidency, the Fire Brigades Union boss Matt Wrack, told the Financial Times - which first reported details of the campaign - that he expected delegates to back the demand.

The Public and Commercial Services union (PCS), which is championing the motion, said it aimed to make up for the fact that pay levels had actually fallen an average of 1.5% a year since 2011.

However, it is likely to fuel further attacks on Labour from the Conservatives, who have accused Keir Starmer of being "played by union paymasters"

after a series of pay deals to settle long-running disputes with striking workers including junior doctors and train drivers.

The government has so far offered a 22% pay deal over two years to junior doctors, who had been calling for a 35% rise to counter a fall in real wages over the past 15 years. The British Medical Association is holding a member ballot on that deal until mid-September.

The government made an offer to the Aslef train drivers' union last week in an effort to end two years of rail chaos. The deal involved a pay rise of nearly 15% over three years, all backdated and pensionable, without any changes to terms and conditions. It has gone out to members to approve.

However, by Friday Aslef had announced plans for 22 days of strikes at weekends from late

1.5%

Claimed average annual fall in real-terms pay levels since 2011 for public sector workers

August to November on LNER trains on the state-run east coast mainline. The rail union emphasised that the strike action was unrelated to the pay deal offered by Labour, which is meant to settle a long-running national dispute involving 16 other train companies.

News of the Aslef strike was compounded by an announcement by the PCS union, which represents nearly 200,000 public sector workers, that 650 of its Border Force members working in passport control at Heathrow would strike between 31 August and 3 September, and would then work to rule, with no overtime, until 22 September.

Separately, nearly half of GP surgeries in England started taking part in industrial action this month for the first time in 60 years, with one in four doctors capping the number of patients seen at 25 a day. The industrial action is being launched in protest at the last government's decision to increase their budget by only 1.9%. Labour has pledged to increase funding for 2024-25 to 6%. Kalyeena Makortoff

National Edinburgh festival fringe

Scottish arts sector tells ministers cuts will have grave impact on 'cultural wellbeing'

Severin Carrell
Scotland editor

Many of Scotland's best known arts organisations, including the Edinburgh festival fringe, and national jazz orchestra, are in uproar over plans for deep cuts in culture funding.

They said the proposed cuts, which came to light in the middle of the Edinburgh festival, would leave Scottish artists in crisis and cause deep damage to the country's reputation and economy.

An open letter, signed by 111 organisations and artists, has been sent to John Swinney, the first minister, Angus Robertson, the culture secretary, and Kate Forbes, the economy secretary, warning that the cuts

would have grave consequences for Scotland's cultural wellbeing.

The signatories said the government was betraying promises from the previous first minister, Humza Yousaf, that funding for Scotland's arts sector would grow by £100m, and it was rowing back on recent pledges to spend another £25m this year.

The row follows orders to the civil service from the Scottish finance secretary, Shona Robison, to freeze or cut all non-essential spending, after the Treasury warned of deep reductions

in public spending this year.

Scottish ministers have already begun cutting spending, including scrapping a pilot scheme that removed peak fares from all domestic rail services, in preparation for an emergency budget this autumn.

Creative Scotland, the government's art agency, warned this month that nearly £10m had suddenly been cut from its budget, including £6.6m in grant-in-aid. The agency told MSPs its budgets were experiencing "severe limitations".

Part of that money was for an open fund worth £3m for hundreds of individual freelance artists, who will now no longer be financially supported.

The open letter, supported by the Fruitmarket and Summerhall arts centres in Edinburgh, the Traverse

£10m

Amount of money cut recently from the budget of the government's art agency Creative Scotland



Street performer Missy Impossible in Edinburgh

theatre, Aberdeen arts centre, and DCA arts centre in Dundee, said those artists were "the heartbeat" of the cultural sector.

The letter said: "Without [the fund] many artists are left without the means to continue their work. This risks sending a stark message out to the world: Scottish arts is closed for business."

"In the same month as the global spotlight is on Scotland's vibrant cultural scene through the Edinburgh festivals, this cessation of support for local artists is particularly devastating."

The letter said the cuts would mean Scottish artists would be absent from the international stage, venues would close, community wealth-building would be put at risk, and talent would be drained from Scotland. Those cumulatively would damage Scotland's economy.

A separate petition launched by the Campaign for the Arts said that the cuts were already damaging the cultural sector and risked a catastrophe. "Meanwhile, more than 45 of Scotland's museums and galleries are at risk of closure within 12 months, and Edinburgh's festivals are warning that Scotland's cultural assets are now in a 'perilously fragile' state," its petition said.

A Scottish government spokesperson said arts funding had already increased this year, and it was committed to investing at least £100m more a year on arts and culture by 2028-29. "The Scottish budget [faces] significant challenges. We are considering the implications of the actions announced by the chancellor [Rachel Reeves] on 29 July for our public finances and the next steps required by the Scottish government."

Arts organisations argue that increased funding merely repaid Creative Scotland the money it lost in earlier cuts.

Lori Anderson, who, in October, is due to become director of Festivals Edinburgh, said arts funding was equal to 0.5% of the Scottish government's overall spending yet delivered far greater benefits to the economy. She said the arts had 15 years of standstill budgets. "It's very disappointing that individual artists are going to be the most affected. They're the most vulnerable but they're the heart of the sector."

◀ Crowds watch an acrobat during the Edinburgh fringe. Many artists condemn the deep cuts in arts funds

PHOTOGRAPH: ARCH WHITE/ALAMY LIVE

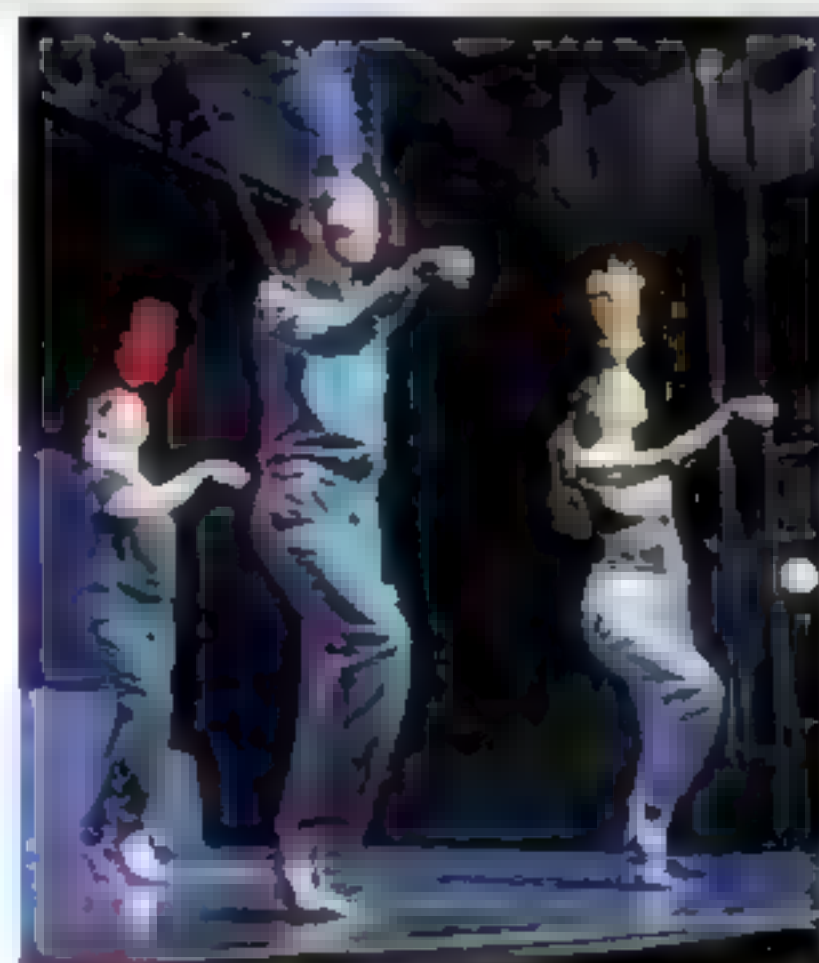
Stage Balancing act of satire and celebration

Show Pony
Summerhall, Edinburgh
★★★★☆

Chris Wiegand

Three women are remembering their introduction to the circus as children. It offered not just a world of wonder but also freedom and refuge. The trio share and recreate cherished memories of their tumbling and clowning; one loved contortion tricks so much that she convinced her school to include one in the nativity play.

Circus gave performance careers to these "show ponies" but it has not been kind to them. After the years of training and accruing wisdom they are reaching their 40s



▲ The women perform while talking of ageing in a profession that only seems to value youth

and 50s and find themselves shut out of an industry obsessed with youth. "And you know what they do to old ponies."

Lena Ries, Anke van Engelshoven and Romy Seibt run the Berlin-based company Still Hungry and collaborated with Bryony Kimmings on the show Raven, about juggling parenting with performing. The parties have reunited to co-create a piece that deconstructs the sort of bombastic circus act lampooned in their opening scene. They execute tricks while explaining how they are achieved - a radical approach that risks making them less impressive.

The trio successfully walk a tightrope of celebrating and

satirising the art form. There is a hilarious sequence on our romantic associations of circus with plucky orphans and fortune-telling sideshows. In between these sketches are aerial routines, meteor-juggling and dance breaks.

Show Pony is not just for circophiles. What is striking is how the prejudices and expectations - make everything look effortless, don't talk about period pains or menopause - apply offstage, too.

This is a show that looks to the past and future with a mixture of often mordant humour, poignancy and pride. But what emerges most is the bond between the women.

Until 26 August

Comedy

Loss and redemption revealed in comic turns

First 3 Minutes of 17 Shows
Pleasance Courtyard
★★★★☆

Brian Logan

The First 3 Minutes of 17 Shows, Abby Wambaugh titles her fringe debut. It's a catchy concept, and as our host wheels through the first handful of her 17 openings, the fun is in imagining the full-

length shows each implies. But the gimmick wouldn't be sustainable if it weren't revealed as a smokescreen for something richer, relating to a painful personal experience that the show, and Wambaugh's standup career, exists in part to redeem.

As directed by Lara Ricote, The First 3 Minutes (for which Wambaugh has been nominated for a best newcomer award) is a masterpiece of construction, an anthology of dotty creative ideas that resolves into an affecting story

of the comic's miscarriage, and of the value of beginnings that never reach a middle and an end.

But you won't see that coming as we begin, with Wambaugh impersonating a vacuum cleaner, then delivering two variations on autobiographical standup, introducing our host as non-binary, a Denmark resident and a mum.

The next "first three minutes", in the style of the New York storytelling club The Moth, recounts Wambaugh's experience of discovering she was pregnant.

Is a story cohering? Not quite yet; the format allows Wambaugh to reset over and again. There are larky interactive stunts - helpful in building audience rapport. There's a prop skit as a banana, then as the digit 9. Even these narrative outliers are retrofitted, though, to yield emotional significance

But this remains a lovely debut, a tender tale of loss in the eye-catching guise of a high-concept comedy experiment.

Until 26 August



Theatre

An addictive drama about masculinity

The Fifth Step
Lyceum, Edinburgh
★★★★☆

Arifa Akbar

There are few certainties in David Ireland's latest drama. It is slippery yet sincere, funny but serious, with an ending that might leave you none the wiser. A young out-of-work alcoholic is unsure about joining the 12-step programme until a former addict sweeps in as his sponsor to save him, or so it seems.

Luka (Jack Lowden) meets the older James (Sean Gilder) through Alcoholics Anonymous. The play's focus is the titular fifth step towards recovery, which requires writing down all the things that bring guilt and shame to share with a trusted friend.

James seems fatherly at first but becomes angrily judgmental; Luka is uncertain of himself but then confrontational and also fatherly. Certainties are unpinned, just like Milla Clarke's revolving set, which partly collapses to show its innards until nothing seems straightforwardly real.

Under the direction of Finn den Hertog, The Fifth Step sometimes

▲ Jack Lowden as Luka, who is struggling with the fifth step of the Alcoholics Anonymous programme
PHOTOGRAPH: MIHAELA BODLOVIC

feels oddly paced, with movement crudely contrived and a visual hallucination of a giant rabbit that seems borrowed from Donnie Darko and which is too abruptly abandoned. But this is a more intimate two-hander than Ireland's usual fare, less blackly comic and perhaps more complex.

Lowden, as jittery Luka, and Gilder as the avuncular James, have an easy connection on stage, both giving intense performances without becoming overwrought. Lowden's delivery sits between uneasy comedy and vulnerability, while Gilder's character becomes more red-faced and paranoid, so you begin to suspect it is he who has fallen off the wagon.

More than a study of addiction or recovery, the play is a portrait of marooned young masculinity apparently in the throes of sexual crisis, although questions around homosexuality seem rather flat-footed, and Luka's sexual self-discovery more a plot twist than rooted in psychology.

"I think I might be an incel," says Luka, and the line gets laughs, but you can see that his mix of suicidal loneliness, porn-fuelled sexual frustration and a blind focus born of an addictive personality perhaps might lead him down that path.

Instead, the zeal - or addiction - finds a home in religion after Luka has a spiritual awakening on a gym treadmill. The Catholic church butts heads with Taoism and Presbyterianism. The "higher power" of the 12-step programme is queried, too. This is a puzzle of a play, but in a good way.

Until 25 August, then at the Pavilion theatre, Glasgow, 28-31 August

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Second murder suspect arrested over death of van driver in Leeds

Robyn Vinter
North of England correspondent

A second man has been arrested on suspicion of the murder of a parcel delivery driver who was killed in Leeds on Tuesday.

The 24-year-old suspect, who had

been on the run for two days, was arrested alongside a woman suspected of assisting an offender. A 32-year-old man who was arrested on Wednesday on suspicion of murder remains in custody.

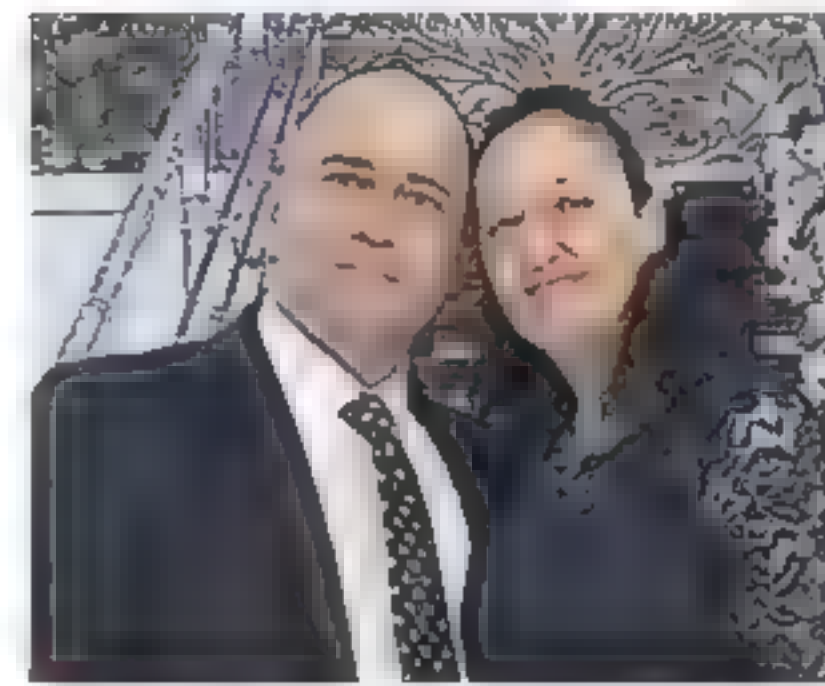
Detectives are appealing for witnesses to the death of Claudiu-Carol Kondor, 42, who was described by his

colleagues as a “dedicated and cherished” friend.

Kondor was pronounced dead at the scene in Wortley, Leeds, on Tuesday after his silver Ford Transit van was stolen while he was making a delivery. He was given emergency medical treatment by paramedics at about 6.50pm but was pronounced dead a short time after.

The van was later found abandoned about six miles away in the Belle Isle suburb of Leeds.

In a tribute, Mike Neill, the operations manager of SP Transport



▲ More than £17,000 has been donated to the family of Claudiu-Carol Kondor via an online appeal

Group, the delivery company Kondor worked for, said the “unimaginable loss has left us all devastated”.

More than £17,000 has been donated to the family of Kondor, who was from Sheffield, in an online fundraiser. On Wednesday, police described the death as a “truly shocking incident”.

The senior investigating officer, DCI James Entwistle, said: “We have spoken to a number of witnesses but are still very keen to hear from anyone who witnessed any part of this incident.”

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Two buildings at Leicester university declared unsafe

Jessica Murray
Midlands correspondent

The University of Leicester is dealing with a “major incident” over crumbling buildings on campus that will be closed for years and require a major relocation of classes while they undergo repairs.

Two large buildings on the university’s main campus, where students attend hundreds of lectures and seminars each academic year, will be closed owing to concrete degradation and the corrosion of steel reinforcements that support the structures.

The Bennett building, home to the school of geography, geology and the environment, along with the physics and astronomy building next door, will be closed for at least two years.

A total of 1,500 events, such as lectures and seminars, will be relocated while the work is carried out.

A spokesperson for the university said: “As two buildings are involved, the university is treating this as a major incident, in as far as there has had to be extensive planning to move staff, teaching and research activities to alternative spaces on campus. There is ample space and the planning will be finalised in time for the new academic year.”

The 1970s buildings require work

to their roofs and steel frameworks to ensure they are “structurally sound” and “safe for continued occupation”, according to LeicestershireLive.

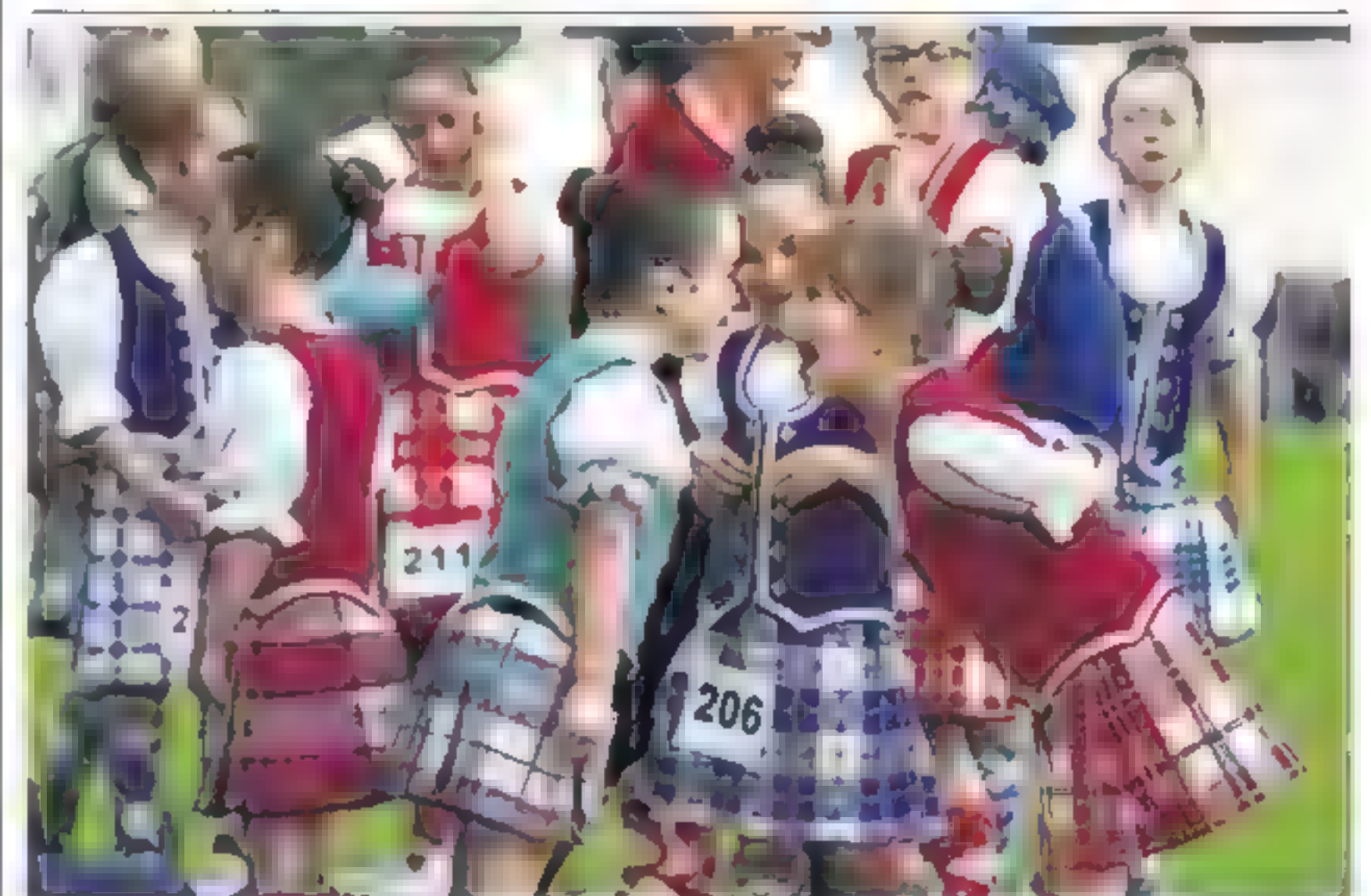
“The impact of re-timetabling will be felt across all university schools and departments,” it reported, citing leaked correspondence between the university and staff.

The nearby Adrian building, which houses the schools of biological sciences and genetics and is famous for being where the principle behind DNA fingerprinting was discovered in 1984, is also suffering from degradation and will be permanently closed. Activities in the building have been wound down over the past two years.

The university said the final cost of all the repair works is not known, but that no redundancies would be made as a result. It also said it had “statutory obligations to teach our students in person” and the closures would not lead to lectures being moved online.

Institutions across the country are facing hefty repair bills to fix ageing buildings and crumbling concrete.

The NHS in England, for instance, has recorded a record repair bill of £12bn, up from £4.7bn in 2011-12, while potentially dangerous reinforced autoclaved aerated concrete in some older buildings forced hundreds of schools and public buildings to close last year.



Friendly rivalry Dancers prepare to compete in the Oban Games, part of the Argyllshire Gathering. The gathering began in 1871 as a way to unite the clans of Argyll through traditional Highland sports. Over time, it has evolved into an annual celebration of Scottish heritage.

PHOTOGRAPH: JEFF MITCHELL/GETTY



▲ A rally organised by Stand Up to Racism Scotland in George Square, Glasgow, this month

PHOTOGRAPH
POLICE SCOTLAND,
PA WIRE

Anti-racism campaigners vow to show far-right groups they are not welcome in Scotland

Libby Brooks
Scotland correspondent

Anti-racism campaigners have vowed to show the far right they are not welcome in Scotland after an anti-immigration rally was planned for Glasgow next month.

However, they warned against a “false sense of security” after the disorder across England and Northern Ireland earlier in the month was not seen in Scotland.

Stand Up to Racism Scotland is planning a major event in Glasgow on 7 September in a coalition with nine trade unions and refugee organisations in response to an anti-immigration rally planned for the city’s George Square.

The anti-immigration rally was promoted by Tommy Robinson, whose real name is Stephen Yaxley-Lennon, the co-founder of the now defunct English Defence League, in the days after the Southport attack.

Organised by the Glasgow Cabbie Facebook page, which has circulated misinformation relating to the murder of three children in Southport, the rally is being promoted online under the same “enough is enough” banner that led to unrest in Liverpool, Manchester, Belfast and Leeds in recent weeks.

The George Square rally will also be a test of Police Scotland’s pledge to deal “swiftly and robustly” with disorder. A spokesperson said: “We are aware of a planned protest and



▲ Tommy Robinson has promoted a far-right rally to be held in Glasgow

have a proportionate policing plan in place.”

Rory Anderson, an organiser for Stand Up to Racism Scotland, said: “The strong message will be that the far right are not welcome in Scotland. It’s important to celebrate resistance as well as diversity, and

I’ve been on the receiving end of death threats because of the colour of my skin from people in Scotland

Humza Yousaf



to show communities are willing to stand together.”

While the anti-racism event’s organisers are hopeful of a similar turnout to those events across England that marked a turning point in the public mood, they are mindful that this is no time for complacency. Reporting by the Ferret news site has found far-right groups in Scotland are using the recent riots elsewhere in the UK to try to recruit new members.

The former first minister Humza Yousaf is similarly wary of complacency, having spoken openly during his time in office about the extreme levels of racism and Islamophobia he and his family have endured.

“I’ve been on the receiving end of death threats, abuse, harassment because of the colour of my skin or my faith – from people in Scotland,” he told the Guardian. “But we also can’t ignore the fact that there haven’t been riots in Scotland so far.”

While his Scottish National party had been “unashamedly pro-immigration”, Yousaf said all parties, including the Scottish Conservatives, had been part of “a general consensus that migration has been good for our country”.

It is a view shared by the Scottish Labour leader, Anas Sarwar, who told an Edinburgh fringe event last week: “Do I think our demographics are different? Yes. Do I think our political discourse is different in Scotland? Yes. Do I think our chattering class and our media is different in Scotland? Yes. Do I think we have

less of a thriving right wing or right of centre media bubble in Scotland? Yes.

“I think all of that has helped contribute to us not having the same problems as you have seen in other parts of the UK.”

But according to Sabir Zazai, the head of the Scottish Refugee Council, the fact that violence did not spread to Scotland has not resulted in communities there feeling any safer.

“There are still people in Scotland who are fearful, not sure what to do. I still have people contacting me directly from asylum hotels asking if their life is at risk,” Zazai said. These hotels had been “easy targets” for the far right for years in Scotland too, he said, with regular demonstrations outside one in Erskine led by the group Patnotic Alternative.

Zazai, himself a refugee who fled conflict in Afghanistan in 1999, also sounded a note of caution for those hoping to join the counterprotest. “We want to push back and not allow hatred to spread, but we want to be sure of people’s safety.”

“We have all fled squares full of people shouting, then shooting, then killing. The conflicts we fled did not start with bullets.”

Talat Yaqoob, an anti-racism campaigner and commentator, agreed that heightened awareness and anxiety remained, particularly among those who were visibly Muslim such as women wearing hijabs.

She said Scotland had not seen similar far-right violence so far partly because there were proportionally fewer black and minority ethnic citizens living in Scotland.

But she cautioned against “Scottish exceptionalism”. “I’ve still had a lifetime of racism and Islamophobia living here,” she said.

While the far right’s 7 September rally was “one attempt of many to try to stoke division”, Yousaf said “there will be more riots, more incidents of racial and religious tension, hostility towards migrants, if we just do not address the underlying issues”.

Rotherham ‘Disgraceful example of a grandfather’ jailed over riot

Robyn Vinter

A 61-year-old man who waved conspiracy theory placards and screamed abuse at police outside a hotel housing asylum seekers was told he was a “disgraceful example” of a grandfather as he was sentenced to two years and eight months in prison.

Peter Lynch was at the front of a mob that gathered outside the Holiday Inn Express in Manvers, Rotherham, on 4 August, shouting “scum” and “child killers” at police, Sheffield crown court heard.

Body-worn camera footage was shown to the court of him screaming “you are protecting people who are killing our kids and raping them” at officers with riot shields.

He was also pictured holding a placard asserting the corruption of MPs, judges, the media and the police.

Asked by Judge Richardson KC about the meaning of the placard, Ian West, defending, said: “It’s a general conspiracy theory against anyone and any form of authority. This was slightly off-topic from what was going on that day.”

Lynch, who has four children and three grandchildren, pleaded guilty to a charge of violent disorder. Richardson said to him: “What a disgraceful example you are as a grandfather.”

Fifty-eight police officers, three police dogs and a police horse were injured in the South Yorkshire town as rioters broke into the hotel, which was housing 240 asylum seekers, and tried to set fire to it.

A 27-year-old described by prosecutors as one of the main instigators of violence during widespread disorder in Middlesbrough has also been jailed for two years and eight months.

Matthew Putson was with a group who were making racial slurs before he kicked a police officer. He was dragged away by others before he could be arrested during trouble in his home town on 4 August, Teesside crown court heard.

With his face disguised, Putson was later seen to have climbed up traffic lights before he picked up bottles, bricks and stones and threw them at police over a period of about an hour.

Putson admitted violent disorder and assaulting an emergency worker. Judge Laird KC jailed him for 32 months. “The public are rightfully outraged by this behaviour on our streets,” he said.

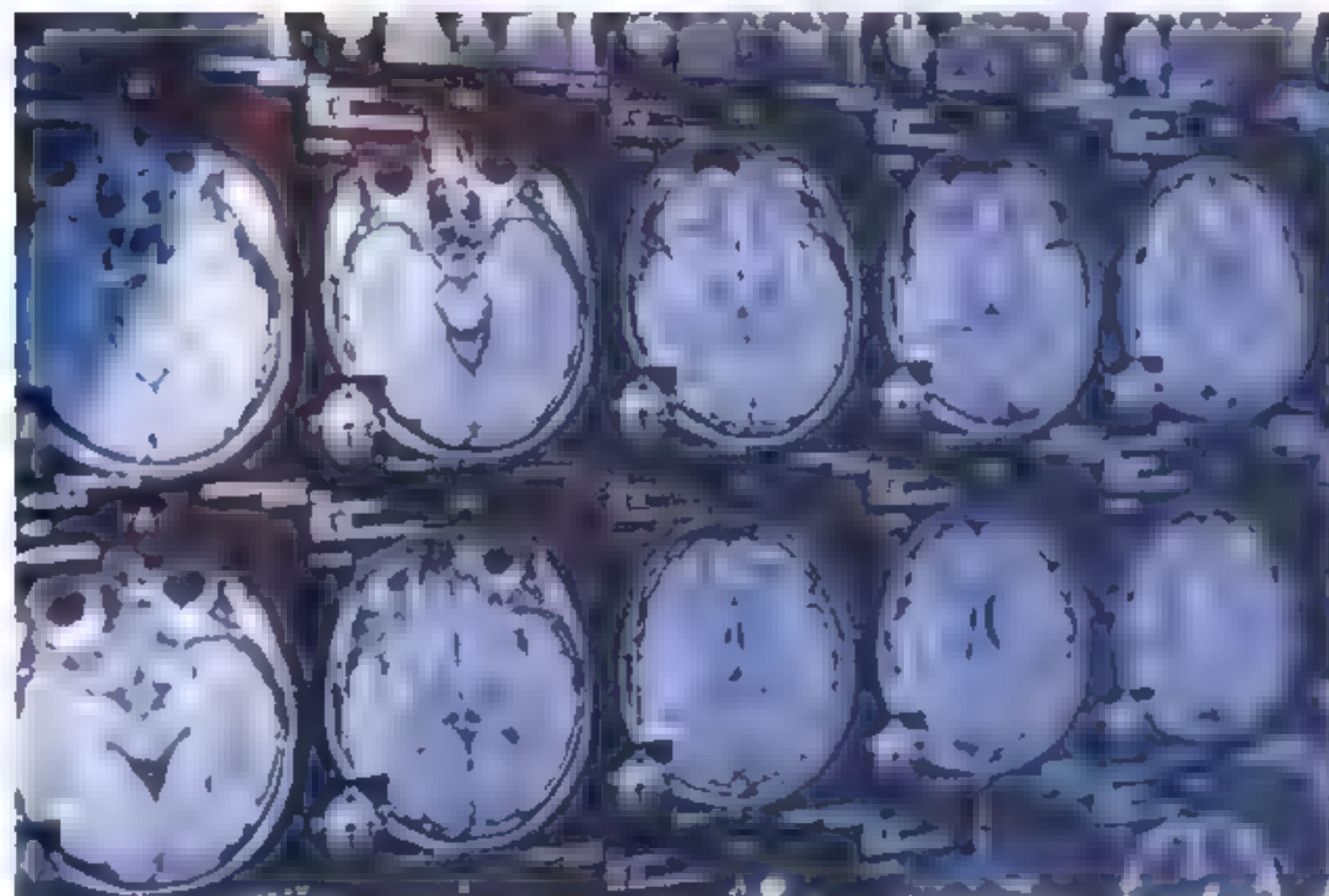


▲ Peter Lynch, aged 61, pleaded guilty to violent disorder after video footage showed him abusing police

Andrew Gregory
Emily Dugan

The Medicines and Healthcare products Regulatory Agency (MHRA), the UK's drugs regulator, gave the green light to the drug yesterday. However, the National Institute for Health and Care Excellence (Nice), the health regulator,

The therapy, also known as Leqembi, is approved in the US, China, Hong Kong, Israel, Japan and South Korea. The green light from the MHRA means the UK has become the first country in Europe to license the drug that can treat the neurodegenerative condition rather than its symptoms. However, the rejection



27%

The reduction in cognitive decline in early patients after taking lecanemab, according to trials

"However, the reality is that the benefits this first treatment provides are just too small to justify

"We're assured that, together with the conditions of the licence approval, the appropriate regulatory standards for this medicine have been met. We will keep its safety under close review, and with a controlled post-authorisation safety study to be undertaken, we will ensure that the benefit-risk of lecanemab in clinical use is closely followed up."



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Representative Example	Duration of Device Plan	Upfront Cost	Monthly Device Payment	Credit Amount	Total Amount Payable for Device	Interest Rate	Representative APR	Cash Price	Airtime Plan	Airtime Plan April 2025 March 2026	Airtime Plan April 2026 March 2027
iPhone 15	36 months	£30	£18.56	£668.32	£698.32	0%	0%	£698.32	£21	£21 + RPI announced in Feb 2025 + 3.9% = Price A	Price A + RPI % announced in Feb 2026 + 3.9%

RPI rate is the Retail Price Index rate of inflation announced in February each year. Pay £0 airtime for the first 6 months then rolling monthly airtime plan from month 7 for the remainder of your contract. £30 upfront payment required and monthly device on a payment of £18.56 per month applies for the duration of your contract. 6 months £0 airtime offer does not apply to Ultimate tariffs. Subject to availability. Ends 19 September 2024. Data allowances must be used within the month and cannot be carried over. **O2 Refresh custom plans: Direct purchases only. Pay the cash price for your device or spread the cost over 3 to 36 months (excludes dongles). The device cost will be the same whatever you choose. There may be an upfront cost. You can pay off your Device Plan at any time and choose to keep your Airtime Plan, upgrade it, or leave. If you are in the first 24 months of your Device Plan and you cancel your Airtime Plan you will have to pay the remainder of your Device Plan in full. After 24 months you can keep your Airtime Plan, upgrade it, or end it without affecting your Device Plan. 0% APR. Finance subject to status and credit checks. 18+ Direct Debit Credit provided by Telefonía (UK) Ltd. RG2 6UU. Telefonía UK is authorised and regulated by the FCA for consumer credit and insurance. Terms apply. See o2.co.uk/terms**



◀ A cyclist avoids potholes in Brighton. Councils, which are responsible for managing most roads, experienced funding cuts of 40% in real terms between 2010 and 2020

PHOTOGRAPH: SIMON DACK, ALAMY

'A national disgrace'

Potholes put cyclists' lives at risk and leave drivers out of pocket

Clea Skopeliti

Andrew Leach, 66, was cycling to his daughter's netball match in Oxford in November 2021 when he hit a pothole, falling off his bike. He lay in the middle of the Oxfordshire B road, unable to move, for about 90 minutes, until police arrived and moved him to the side of the road. "It was coming up to rush hour. I think I am very lucky not to have been killed," he said, as passersby followed advice to wait for an ambulance. "It showed the state of emergency services too – they're clearly overstretched."

After a three-hour wait for an ambulance, Leach was taken to hospital: the fall had broken his hip. While it was the most severe incident, it was just one of many potholes the 66-year-old from Solihull has encountered as a cyclist. "Over the last 10 years I have noticed a marked deterioration in road surfaces around the country," said Leach, who is retired.

The government is under pressure to improve road

infrastructure as the number of drivers concerned about its state has hit record levels after years of underinvestment, a survey by the RAC found. Councils, responsible for managing 98% of roads, had central government funding for local services cut by 40% in real terms between 2010 and 2020.

Leach noticed a real difference on cycling holidays to mainland Europe. "The roads are safer for all and encourage an active lifestyle and bring tourism to the area," he said, adding that he came across only a handful of potholes on a 350-mile route through the Italian Alps.

This was a far cry from the roads in the Lake District, Leach noted. This was echoed by Daniel Hunter, a retired 56-year-old in north Cumbria. "It's a national disgrace!"



▲ Andrew Leach, who says he was fortunate not to be killed after falling

'We take pride in our surroundings'

Woman, 75, uses gardening tools to fix road

As a resident of Caithness, the most northerly part of the British mainland, Jenny Paterson has access to unspoilt wilderness, dramatic seascapes and spectacular sightings of the aurora borealis.

Yet at a more mundane level, the scourge of potholes respects no boundaries, and so the 75-year-old decided to fill in the accident-inducing eyesores outside her home by herself, with the help of a neighbour and some gardening equipment.

Paterson describes a "12ft long crater" outside her house, on the main street in the village of Halkirk, the result of some digging work that had never been resurfaced, as well as other lumps and bumps.

"It's the water that collects there that's annoying me," she told BBC Radio Scotland. "The outside wall of my house is quite damp and I'm not a structural engineer but I'm wondering if that's part of the problem."

Paterson began clearing the gully outside her house, which regularly fills up with debris and earth, then decided to use what she had cleared to fill in the holes. She used a rake, spade, bucket and shovel and spent three and a half hours levelling an uneven section of road surface.

"My lovely neighbour, Jen MacDonald, next door helped me and the two of us tackled it together – we take pride in our surroundings as does Halkirk as a whole.

"It's a beautiful village but Caithness council's not very interested in us I feel. So it's up to us. We both got slightly carried away at that stage and tried to



▲ Jenny Paterson fixing the problem area outside her home in Halkirk

level out the area to keep the water away," she said.

Paterson undertook the resurfacing project against doctor's orders. "I had some surgery two months ago and I was told not to lift things," she admitted, "but I'm fine and I'm not a person to sit around and do nothing anyway."

Paterson described the state of the roads in the local area as "disgraceful". "It's a beautiful little village with a great community council but unfortunately all the roads desperately need doing," she said. "I can't fill in every pothole so I filled in mine."

The Highland council said: "Whilst the council appreciates the concerns around pothole repairs, it is not appropriate for individuals to undertake repairs on the public highway. This raises health and safety concerns for the individuals involved and potentially invalidates the council's insurance should any claims be made.

"The service is doing all it can to carry out repairs as timeously as possible with the resources available. Potholes or other defects can be reported to the council using the online 'report a problem' form." Libby Brooks

Hunter said, noting that tourists visiting the area find uneven roads that make it challenging to drive and ride safely. "This is what we're showing off as the sixth largest economy in the world ... Even though I'm opposed to them, you're almost not surprised people want four-wheel drive."

Hunter said: "Things have got worse since 2010 – the lack of investment and maintenance has hit awfully." But he believes improvements are starting to be made. "We've got a pothole-fixing machine in the last year or so – you can see they're trying."

The state of the roads has caused damage to his car, Hunter said. "Because we're in Cumbria, potholes are often covered in water. You just don't know whether you're going into a puddle or a pothole."

In the last two years, he believes potholes have cost him about £280 in repairs: first, owing to damage to the front suspension on his 2004 Volkswagen Passat, and then the front coil snapping. "It's become one of the expenses of motoring. It's almost like off-roading. Who picks up the tab for not repairing roads? The car owner."

Like Leach, Hunter is a keen cyclist, and has had to adapt as his local roads fell into disrepair. "We used to ride road bikes and now we ride mountain bikes on the same roads. You'd come home with your bones rattled."

For newer motorists, the state of the UK's roads can be particularly challenging. Yasamin, a 29-year-old actor, remembered learning to drive in Cheltenham as "ridiculous". "My instructor was constantly having to have his car repaired because of damage he said was caused by potholes," she said.

Her test in March 2022 was "an absolute mess", she said. "None of the routes I'd been practising on were available due to emergency resurfacing works – we had to follow diversion signs the whole way. I had to do the emergency stop exercise for real because a man riding his bike in front of us hit a pothole and fell off."

She was out of pocket by £190 last November after her front wheels needed replacing because of damage a mechanic told her was due to potholes. "I swerve around potholes, but there were bulges and damage to the front two."

Sally, an NHS doctor in Trafford, Greater Manchester, said her husband had three punctures within three weeks at the beginning of this year – damage she said was caused by potholes. "It got so bad we have changed our car to one with fatter tyres, at the expense of the environment and financial cost," the 44-year-old said, explaining that they swapped their electric vehicle for a secondhand diesel car. "We would have kept it but it's too big a risk financially and the roads seem to be getting worse, not better."

Road closures as a result of potholes and planned works in her area mean that her children have regularly been late for school. "I've also struggled to get to work due to potholes, road diversions and repairs," she said. "I report potholes almost daily."

Harris sets out her vision to convince US to elect its first female president

Lauren Gambino
Chicago

Kamala Harris faced the biggest test of her political life last night: addressing the Democratic national convention in an effort to persuade American voters to defeat Donald Trump in November's presidential election and put her in the White House.

The vice-president's rocket-fuelled campaign is still barely a month old after Joe Biden's decision to withdraw from the presidential race after a disastrous debate performance and amid questions over his age and mental acuity.

Harris and her vice-presidential pick, the Minnesota governor, Tim Walz, have quickly changed the election's narrative, turning a solid Trump lead in the polls over Biden into a small but clear advantage over the former Republican president.

In addressing the Democratic convention – and the wider US electorate watching in their millions on television – Harris aimed to make a direct pitch to voters to back her vision for the country.

Last night's theme was "For Our Future". After another long list of speakers – cabinet secretaries, senators, governors, members of Congress and political activists – the evening was set to end with Harris's historic acceptance speech in which she would become the first woman of colour to accept a major party's presidential nomination.

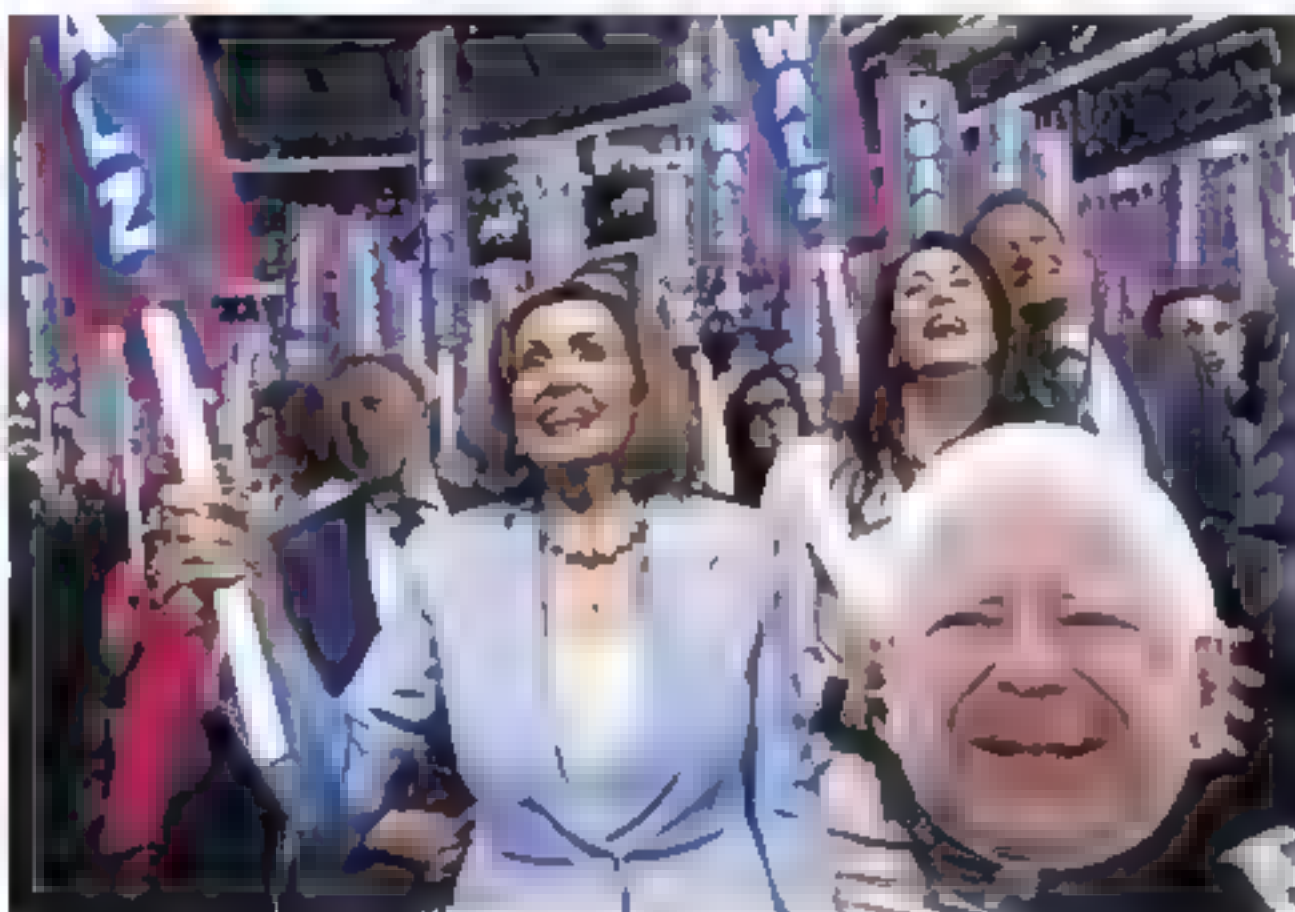
Harris's campaign has sought to portray a more optimistic, future-focused view of the country than her rival, and perhaps also than that of the president, who had based much of his pitch on dark warnings of Trump's autocratic sympathies.

Over the course of the week at the convention in Chicago, the audience has heard from the Democratic party's most powerful players, who threw their support unequivocally behind Harris.

Biden, Barack and Michelle Obama, Hillary and Bill Clinton, and Nancy Pelosi all gave prime-time speeches, as did some of the party's rising stars,

► Nancy Pelosi, the former House speaker, is among the top party figures to have thrown their support behind Harris

PHOTOGRAPH
YALONDA M JAMES/
SAN FRANCISCO
CHRONICLE/AP



No Freedom for Trump



Beyoncé has blocked Donald Trump from using her song Freedom, after the track – the central song for Kamala Harris's campaign – was used in a Trump campaign video.

Trump's spokesman, Steven Cheung, posted the video showing Trump walking off a plane, backed by Freedom. Rolling Stone and Billboard reported that Beyoncé's record label and publisher moved to block the use. Cheung's video has been deleted from social media.

The Harris-Walz team has made Freedom a core part of its campaign, unveiling a new a cappella version. Harris has also used the song at other events, and her supporters have been pictured wearing cowboy hats and "Cowboy Kamala" sashes, referencing Beyoncé's album Cowboy Carter.

Tim Walz, meanwhile, left the stage at the convention to the sound of Rockin' in the Free World, Neil Young's savagely ironic 1989 track about a US riven by homelessness and drug addiction. A campaign official told CNN Young had approved the use of the song.

The use is perhaps a semi-veiled dig at Donald Trump, who often used the song himself at rallies between 2015 and 2020. Young vociferously opposed the use on numerous occasions. In 2020 he wrote in an open letter to Trump: "Every time ... one of my songs is played at one of your rallies, I hope you hear my voice. Remember it is the voice of a tax-paying US citizen who does not support you. Me."

Ben Beaumont-Thomas

such as Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez. Harris's speech was expected to lay out her personal story as she bids to become the first female president.

Her communications director, Michael Tyler, said the vice-president would share her experiences as the daughter of a working mother raised in a middle-class neighbourhood, and a prosecutor who fought on behalf of sexual assault survivors and homeowners who had lost everything in the foreclosure crisis.

Tyler said she would share her "optimistic vision for America's future, a new way forward" and draw a contrast with Trump's Project 2025 agenda, a conservative policy blueprint from which the Republican ticket has tried unsuccessfully to distance itself.

Across three days so far, speaker after speaker has hailed Harris as a change agent who would not only defeat Trump but lift the country higher, ushering in a new chapter of possibility and seek to return US politics to some semblance of normality since Trump came on to the political stage eight years ago.

The Harris campaign – and especially the outspoken Walz – has also displayed sharp elbows and an ability to insult and poke fun at Trump.

On Wednesday night, Walz offered a full-throated attack on Trump, a defence of his record running Minnesota and a passionate advocacy for Harris.

After criticising the Trump campaign, he led the crowd of cheering delegates in a chant of "We're not going back!"

Harris's success in the polls and newfound edge has impressed many observers. "She has had a very good month not just because of a honeymoon but because of the way she's presented herself, the way her campaign has positioned her," said David Axelrod, a former top aide to Barack Obama.

Certainly it seems to have unsettled Trump and his campaign. He has adopted a policy of directly insulting Harris and inventing a series of nicknames for her while trying to paint her as a leftwing extremist and questioning her racial identity. But the jibes have had little effect and drawn criticism from senior Republicans.

They have not blunted her lead. Harris consistently tops Trump by three or four points in recent head-to-head surveys and has also improved her standing in the handful of swing states that are crucial to victory.

While the electoral vote contest remains extremely close, the vice-president has widened the battleground once more from the rust belt states of Michigan, Wisconsin and Pennsylvania to again include sun belt states such as North Carolina, Arizona and Georgia.



Young progressives

Voters 'fired up' but Gaza and climate top demands

Joan E Greve
Chicago

Progressive Democrats presented a united front at the party's convention this week as they threw their support behind Kamala Harris as the presidential nominee.

But even as they talked up the genuine enthusiasm surrounding Harris's campaign, they have made clear they expect her to deliver policy wins for her progressive coalition if she wins the general election in November.

Prominent progressives such as Bernie Sanders and Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez had expressed doubts about the wisdom of abandoning Joe Biden four months before election day, but said they have seen first-hand how Harris's campaign has reinvigorated voters.

"In Kamala Harris we have a chance to elect a president who is for the middle class because she is from the middle class," Ocasio-Cortez said in her speech on Monday. "She understands the urgency of rent cheques and groceries and prescriptions. She is as committed to our reproductive and civil rights as she is to taking on corporate greed." Ocasio-Cortez issued a wholehearted endorsement of the new nominee.

In his own convention speech, Sanders pledged that Democrats would use their governing power to "tax the rich", "take on price gouging" and "expand Medicare".

The possibility of that change has animated progressives. "The energy is electrifying and it's a lot of young folks," the congresswoman Pramila Jayapal, chair of the Congressional Progressive caucus, told the Guardian. "If you have young people, if you

▼ Tim Walz and his family after he formally accepted the Democratic party's vice-presidential nomination

PHOTOGRAPH: MANDEL NGAN/AFP/GETTY IMAGES



have progressives, black, brown, Indigenous folks, working-class folks, that is actually the base that helps us to win because they are the ones that go door-to-door. They're the ones that mobilise voters."

To deliver on the promises that progressives are seeking, Harris may have to distance herself from Biden in certain areas, especially climate and the war on Gaza.

During his 2020 campaign, Biden embraced a sweeping climate agenda as he looked to reassure the millions of progressive voters who had not backed him in the primary. While Biden signed the most significant federal climate bill in history, the Inflation Reduction Act failed to follow through on his campaign pledge of "no more drilling on federal lands".

Progressives hope Harris will stick to some of the promises that Biden made as a candidate but then walked back. "We cannot have that happen again," Jeff Merkley, a senator, told the Guardian. "We, as climate truth-tellers, have to be very present, very loud, very determined to say, 'We will back you 1,000%, but you can't keep expanding the fossil infrastructure.'"

If Harris cannot draw that contrast, she risks alienating young voters, Merkley argued.

"She knows that the politics of this election involve young folks, and they aren't going to accept empty promises. There has to be performance," he said.

The demands for action are arguably the loudest when it comes to Biden's weakest issue with progressives: the war on Gaza. Biden has attracted severe criticism over his handling of the war, particularly among young progressive voters, and polls show an overwhelming majority of Democrats support a ceasefire.

Ocasio-Cortez commended Harris for "working tirelessly to secure a ceasefire in Gaza and bringing hostages home", but a fellow House progressive appeared to challenge that language.

Speaking at a press conference hosted by the pro-ceasefire



Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez has endorsed Kamala Harris

Uncommitted Movement in Chicago on Wednesday, Ilhan Omar, a congresswoman, condemned Biden administration officials for "refusing to recognise the genocidal war that is taking place in Gaza". She pointedly added: "Working tirelessly for a ceasefire is really not a thing, and they should be ashamed of themselves for saying such things because we supply these weapons. So if you really wanted a ceasefire, you just stop sending the weapons."

If Harris cannot deliver on her policy promises, she may struggle to keep her coalition united beyond inauguration day. But progressives largely appear ready and energised about the prospect of electing her in November and are hopeful she will adopt some of their agenda.

Becca Balint, a Democratic congresswoman, shared an anecdote about a young woman working at a coffee shop in her home state of Vermont who said she did not feel she could organise her friends on Biden's behalf because they weren't excited about his re-election. Now, with Harris as the nominee, the woman felt she had a new outlook on the election, Balint recounted. "I'm so fired up," Balint said, "because I know - I hear directly from the young people in my district - they're really fired up."



▲ Oprah Winfrey, a registered independent, called on undecided voters to choose 'decency and respect' at the ballot PHOTOGRAPH: ALEX WROBLEWSKI/AFP/GETTY

Independents Vote for 'best of America', urges Winfrey

Helen Sullivan

Oprah Winfrey spoke at a Democratic convention for the first time on Wednesday night, giving an enthusiastic endorsement to Kamala Harris.

In a forceful, vigorous speech that ranged from school integration to "childless cat ladies", Winfrey sought to encourage voters to cast their ballot for "the best of America".

Winfrey said she was a registered independent and called on other independents and undecideds to vote. "Values and character matter most of all. In leadership and in life. And more than anything, you know this is true, decency and respect are on the ballot in 2024.

"I've actually travelled from the redwood forests ... to the Gulf Stream waters," Winfrey said, referring to the Woody Guthrie song This Land Is Your Land. She said she had seen and been on the receiving end of sexism, inequality and division, but that more often than not, people would help when others were in trouble.

"They are the best of America, and despite what some would have you think, we are not so different from our neighbours. When a house is on fire, we don't ask whose house it is. If the place happens to belong to a childless cat lady, well, we try to get that cat out too," she said.

Her comments were a reference to the Republican vice-presidential nominee, JD Vance, who said the US was run by "childless cat ladies".

Winfrey also spoke of Tessie Prevost Williams who, aged six, was part of the first two desegregated classrooms in New Orleans in 1960. Williams died last month. The New Orleans Four - as Williams and three other students became known - paved the way for a "girl, nine years later, to become part of the second integrated class" at her school in California, Winfrey said in reference to Harris, who was part of a bussing programme.

"Soon, and very soon, we're going to be teaching our daughters and sons

about how this child of an Indian mother and a Jamaican father, two idealistic, energetic immigrants ... grew up to become the 47th president of the United States," she said.

Asked afterwards about her decision to speak, she told CBS: "There couldn't have been a life like mine, a career like mine, a success like mine, without a country like America ... And all of the freedoms that I have enjoyed, the successes that I have enjoyed, I feel that they're on the line and at stake in this moment."

Winfrey endorsed Barack Obama in 2008, Hillary Clinton in 2016, and Joe Biden in 2020, but this was her first appearance at a convention.

In 2012, researchers at Northwestern University and the University of Maryland used Winfrey's endorsement of Barack Obama ahead of the 2008 Democrat primary to examine whether it had any effect on voting. The researchers found that her endorsement was worth about a million votes for Obama, who beat Hillary Clinton by about 270,000 votes in the states used in the sample.

Trump behind glass

Appearing in a bulletproof glass pen, Donald Trump took the stage in Asheboro, North Carolina, for his first outdoor event since he was hurt in a shooting that injured two spectators and killed a man at a rally in Butler, Pennsylvania, last month.

After the shooting the Secret Service recommended that he hold indoor rallies only. But last week it said it would use bulletproof glass to protect him at outdoor rallies.

At the event in North Carolina on Wednesday Trump focused on national security and continued his attacks on his Democratic opponent, Kamala Harris.

Alice Herman



▲ Donald Trump appears behind bulletproof glass in North Carolina

Scottish student, 19, dies in fall from her hotel balcony in Ibiza

Libby Brooks
Scotland correspondent

A Scottish law student has died in Ibiza after reportedly falling from a sixth-floor hotel balcony.

Emma Ramsay, 19, is reported to have died in the early hours of

Tuesday morning after a fall at a beachfront hotel in the resort of San Antonio, in the north-west of the Spanish island.

Spain's Guardia Civil police force said the death was being treated as an accident.

The University of Strathclyde student had posted images showing



▲ Emma Ramsay was studying law at the University of Strathclyde

her enjoying her holiday with friends in the hours immediately before her death.

In a post on social media, her mother, Barbara, described her as "my best friend in the whole world". She wrote: "I am going to miss you more than words will ever express. Rest in peace my sweet angel and sleep tight. Mummy loves you so so much."

A spokesperson for the University of Strathclyde in Glasgow, where Ramsay was studying law, said: "Emma was a much-loved member

of our student community and we are shocked and saddened by her death."

She was a former pupil at St John Ogilvie high school in Hamilton, where she had been head girl.

The headteacher, Lorna Lawson, said: "Emma was an incredibly kind, hard-working, bright and talented pupil who contributed a great deal to our school community."

A Foreign Office spokesperson said: "We are supporting the family of a British woman who has died in Spain and are in contact with the local authorities."

NOTICE OF ACTION REGARDING <privatedinersclubportal.co.uk>

Diners Club International Limited ("Plaintiff") has filed an action in rem in the United States District Court for the District of Arizona, Civil Action No. CV-24-01559-PHX-SPL, alleging that the registration and use of the domain name <privatedinersclubportal.co.uk> infringes upon Diners Club Trademarks and constitutes cybersquatting in violation of the laws of the United States. A written answer or other response to the claims of Plaintiff's Complaint must be filed with the Court no later than October 5, 2024. If no appearance or pleading is filed, the Court may render a judgment against the domain name, which could include the forfeiture or cancellation of the domain name or the transfer of the domain name to Plaintiff.

Attorney of Record for Plaintiff:

David G. Barker

Daniel M. Staren

SNELL & WILMER L.L.P.

One East Washington Street

Suite 2700

Phoenix, Arizona 85004-2556

and

Paul McGrady (Pro Hac Vice)

Jason Elster (Pro Hac Vice)

ELSTER & MCGRADY LLC

3847 N. Lincoln Avenue

Second Floor

Chicago, IL 60613

Green MP criticises jailing of activist, 77

Damien Gayle
Environment correspondent

A 20-month prison sentence handed to a 77-year-old woman for a climate protest on the M25 is disproportionate, unjust and a waste of resources, the Green MP Carla Denyer has said.

In a letter to Yvette Cooper, the home secretary, Denyer called the jailing of Gaie Delap three weeks ago "an example of an ongoing and serious problem with disproportionate sentencing for climate activists".

Delap, from Bristol, was sent to prison three weeks ago for her part in a campaign of disruptive protests on the M25 in November 2022.

Denyer, recently elected as the MP for Bristol Central, said she had "deep concern" over the "disproportionate sentence" given to her constituent, whose actions were "entirely peaceful and nonviolent and designed to draw attention to the threat posed by the climate emergency".



▲ Carla Denyer said Gaie Delap's (below, with fellow protesters) sentence was 'disproportionate'

Pointing out that Delap's protest was intended to force the government's hand into a ban on new fossil fuel exploration in the North Sea, Denyer added: "As you will be aware, your government has rightly opted not to issue new licences, meaning that Gaie and her fellow protesters have been jailed for advocating for a position aligning with Labour's own plans."

"So whilst I am encouraged that your government has taken this step towards protecting the environment, Gaie's disproportionate sentencing neither constitutes justice nor is necessary as a means of discouraging participation in further action to stop new oil and gas extraction."

Delap was among several dozen Just Stop Oil supporters who, during a four-day protest campaign, climbed gantries over the M25, the motorway which encircles London, forcing police to stop traffic and leaving an estimated 709,000 drivers stuck in tailbacks.

Five campaigners identified as ringleaders were jailed last month for a total of 21 years over the protests. Trials of more alleged ringleaders and gantry climbers are scheduled for the coming months.

Denyer said the "desperation" that had driven Delap to take part in action over the climate was "shared by many, both in my own constituency and nationally" and was "completely understandable".

"I'd also argue that the substantial cost of Gaie's custodial sentence is a waste of resources," Denyer added.

"At a time when government departments are facing further cuts and the prison estate is so overcrowded that some offenders are being released early, imprisoning a peaceful climate protester such as Gaie represents an unnecessary drain on public funds and ill-judged use of limited prison capacity."

The Home Office was contacted for comment.





Ships from Liverpool carried about 1.5 million Africans across the Atlantic in horrific conditions between 1700 and 1807

PHOTOGRAPH BY BAX WALKER, ALAMY

Liverpool urged to confront past on Slavery Remembrance Day

Neha Gohil

Community affairs correspondent

Liverpool must not “shy away” from its historic involvement in the transatlantic slave trade, the organiser of the 25th anniversary of the city’s Slavery Remembrance Day (SRD) commemorations has said.

Michelle Charters, who is leading the city’s events as part of international Unesco commemorations, said it was important to address and recognise the tarnished history of the city, once known as the slave-trading capital of Britain.

“There’s absolutely tons of conversations that need to be had in terms of the impact we still feel from transatlantic slavery. We cannot hide from that and we cannot shy [away] from it,” said Charters, who was appointed the head of the International Slavery

Museum (ISM) in January. “What we have to do is address it. It’s our history, it’s the UK’s history, and instead of it being hidden it needs to be recognised, remembered, and reconciliation needs to happen.”

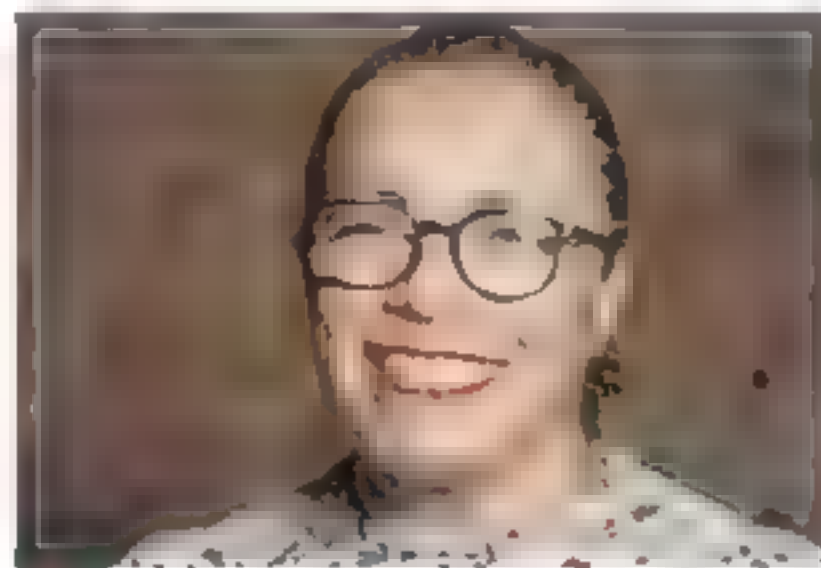
Today’s commemorations mark the uprising of enslaved people in Haiti on the night of 22-23 August 1791 and highlight the millions of lives affected by the transatlantic slave trade and its legacies.

Liverpool first coordinated commemorative events for SRD in 1999, when the council issued a formal apology for its role in the transatlantic slave trade. According to National Museums Liverpool, ships from the city carried about 1.5 million Africans across the Atlantic in horrific conditions between 1700 and 1807.

This year the ISM, in collaboration with National Museums Liverpool, has organised workshops, lectures

and a remembrance walk, which will culminate with a libation ceremony near the Canning Quayside and Dry Docks. The docks were used to clean and repair ships destined to traffic enslaved people across the Atlantic.

Maxine Brown, a community engagement manager at National Museums Liverpool, said such events “should be spread across the UK ... there’s a lot of people that are



▲ Michelle Charters: ‘It needs to be recognised, remembered, not hidden’

committed. From the very first SRD they’ve not missed one.”

Charters added: “It continues to be an important moment in our busy city to pause and remember the many lives impacted by this abhorrent trade, as well as the legacies and achievements of people of the African diaspora.”

The ISM is thought to be the world’s first museum dedicated to slavery internationally. Next year, it will close for three years for a multi-million-pound redevelopment funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund to create a research centre for historians and scholars.

Charters said she continued to be “shocked” by discoveries related to the slave trade. “I truly don’t believe we’re ever going to fully uncover what has been lost to us, what has been taken from us and what we have been denied in terms of our heritage, our culture, our traditions.”

The leader of Liverpool city council, Liam Robinson, said: “SRD has now become a significant date in our cultural calendar, a time when we can reflect on this remorseful part of our heritage and honour the memory of those enslaved Africans who suffered and died.”

‘Nose to tail’ restaurant celebrates 30 years with menu at 1994 prices

Zoe Wood

It was a deal too good to miss so when the Michelin-starred London restaurant St John offered diners the chance to eat celebrated fare such as roast bone marrow and apricots on toast at a fraction of the usual cost, they bit its proverbial arm off.

The feted restaurant, founded by Fergus Henderson and Trevor



▲ The founders of St John, Fergus Henderson and Trevor Gulliver, said ‘a good age deserves a good lunch’

Gulliver, caused a virtual stampede yesterday as it opened bookings for its 30th anniversary celebrations, when it has vowed to recreate its 1994 menus while selling favourites such as crispy fried pig tail and eel, bacon and mash at the original prices.

Tables for next month’s “1994 menu” services were snapped up within minutes of reservations opening on the booking site yesterday.

Those who managed to bag a table will be able to tuck into its famous roast bone marrow and parsley salad for £4.20 rather than 2024’s price of £16. And apricots on toast, another favourite, will cost £3.70 rather than just over a tenner.

First opened within the site of an

old smokehouse by Smithfield market in 1994, St John is now considered one of the most influential restaurants in the world. Announcing the special cut-price menu, the founders said a “good age deserves a good lunch and a good party”.

In a statement on Instagram the founders said: “We simply do things how we feel they should be done, and cook what we want to eat. Those who joined us in our opening weeks will remember such delights as broad beans and carrots at £8.80.

“Perhaps they will remember the outraged article in the Sun at boiled eggs and carrots being exactly that, and charged at £2.50. All this, minus the outrage, will be yours once more.”

Farrow & Ball paint names ‘normalise’ animal cruelty, Peta says

Cash Boyle

Peta has urged the paint manufacturer Farrow & Ball to rename colours that “normalise exploiting animals”.

Citing the colours Dead Salmon, Smoked Trout and Potted Shrimp, Peta said in a letter to Farrow & Ball’s colour curator that “renaming animal product-monikered paints would be a fun way to appeal to more conscious consumers”.

Yvonne Taylor, Peta’s vice-president of corporate projects, wrote that such names were insensitive. “Science concludes that fish are sentient, capable of feeling pain and fear,” she said. “They each have a distinct personality ... and enjoy complex social relationships.”

Taylor added that promoting fish farming, given its impact on the environment, was “at odds with Farrow & Ball’s commitment to sustainability”.

The letter also states that the colours Au Lait and Skimmed Milk White normalise the exploitation of cows, who on dairy farms are taken from their mothers within 36 hours of birth.

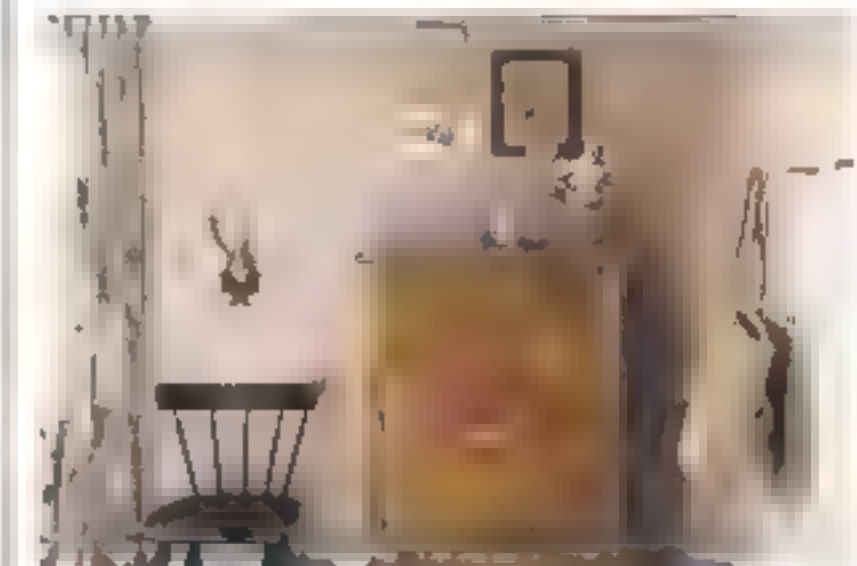
“Cows raised for dairy may spend their entire lives standing on concrete floors and being fed an unnatural diet that includes other animals, before they’re slaughtered at just five years old,” she said.

Crediting Farrow & Ball for having a range that is entirely cruelty-free and mostly vegan, Taylor said that making these changes would “make the range even more inclusive”.

“We hope the Farrow & Ball range will soon be entirely vegan – with Soft Distemper and Casein Distemper also evolving to become animal product-free – but until then, renaming colours that normalise animal abuse is one way to remind others that animals are not food but sentient individuals and members of the delicate ecosystem we all share,” she said.

With more than 9 million members and supporters globally, Peta’s mission statement centres on the opposition of “speciesism” – described on its website as “a human-supremacist worldview” that justifies the mistreatment of species.

Farrow & Ball declined to comment.



▲ Peta has urged Farrow & Ball to rename its Dead Salmon paint ‘to appeal to more conscious consumers’

Eyewitness



▼ **Chattogram, Bangladesh**
Cycle rickshaws attempt to move through a flooded street after three days of monsoon rain left more than 3 million people stranded

across the country, with officials warning water levels could continue to rise over the next 24 hours

PHOTOGRAPH: MOHAMMED SHAJAHAN/
ZUMA PRESS WIRE/REX/SHUTTERSTOCK



World



◀ Oleksandr, in the arms of his mother, Viktoria, in Pokrovsk, Ukraine, as they prepare to flee Russian troops

PHOTOGRAPH: THOMAS PETER REUTERS

▲ A still from social media footage showing a Russian military facility that was hit by a Ukrainian drone in Oktyabrsky, in the Volgograd region, yesterday

Ukraine strikes airfield near Volgograd as Russia presses forward in Donetsk

Luke Harding and Dan Sabbagh Kyiv

Ukraine carried out a night-time drone attack yesterday on a Kremlin military airfield near Volgograd and announced the capture of another village in Russia's Kursk region, as Moscow's forces pressed on with an advance in the Donetsk region.

Volgograd's governor, Andrei Bocharov, said the strike took place at around 3am. Residents reported explosions, and several hours later ammunition continued to detonate as a vast carpet of black smoke engulfed the area.

Ukraine's SBU security service said it had conducted the remote raid against the Marinovka airbase, about 44 miles west of Volgograd, near Kalach-na-Donu. The base houses about 30 Su-34 and Su-35 warplanes. The planes do regular bombing runs against Ukrainian frontline positions, about 280 miles away, the SBU told the Kyiv Independent newspaper.

It was unclear how many jets were

damaged or destroyed. One Russian witness filming the destruction suggested the airfield had been wiped out. "It's a serious tragedy. This is serious stuff," he said.

Ukraine is waging an increasingly ambitious long-range drone campaign against critical Russian infrastructure targets, hitting more than 200. They include oil depots, refineries and arms factories. Last week it struck two airbases: Borisoglebsk, 150 miles inside Russia, and Savasleyka, about 400 miles away.

On Tuesday it launched an attack on Moscow and sent drones to the Arctic Murmansk region, more than 1,000 miles away, where Russian strategic bombers are located. Russia's defence ministry said it had downed all the hostile unmanned aerial vehicles that infiltrated its territory.

Yesterday drones hit a ferry carrying fuel tanks in Kavkaz, not far from the road and rail bridge linking the Russian mainland with occupied Crimea. Kyiv has said it will knock out the "illegal" crossing over the Kerch Strait.

The latest drone strikes came as Volodymyr Zelenskyy went to the border area in Sumy province, from where Ukrainian troops sprang their surprise incursion on 6 August into Russia. Zelenskyy met his commander-in-chief, Oleksandr Syrskyi.

One goal of the operation is to relieve pressure on Ukraine's eastern Donbas region, where Russian combat units have been pressing forward. So far, this has not happened, with Moscow instead sending

reinforcements from the rear and the occupied south of Ukraine. It anything, it has stepped up the tempo of attack around the town of Pokrovsk, a key Ukrainian military hub.

In recent months Russian forces have swallowed up villages to the east of Pokrovsk and are now under seven miles away. They have got to within three miles of the town of Myrnohrad. Residents yesterday were packing up to leave, with shops and banks closing down this week.



◀ Ukrainian troops fire a howitzer at Russian positions near Chasiv Yar in the Donetsk region of Ukraine

Speaking in the Sumy area, Zelenskyy said the Ukrainian-controlled "buffer zone" on the Russian side of the border was saving lives. "Since the start of the Kursk operation, there has been less shelling and fewer civilian casualties in the Sumy region." The armed forces had seized another settlement, he added, and captured more Russian soldiers.

According to Telegram channels, Ukrainian soldiers have captured the village of Krasno-Oktyabrskoye, next to the Seym River. They previously destroyed three bridges and two pontoon crossings on the same stretch of frontline, and pounded the Russian border town of Tetkino, further west.

Several thousand Russian troops are marooned in the Glushkovsky district south of the river. Ukraine seeks to advance there and increase its 480 sq mile bridgehead inside enemy territory. Videos suggest Russian units are putting up strong resistance.

Russia's FSB spy agency, meanwhile, issued an arrest warrant for journalists working for CNN, after they went on assignment to the Russian town of Sudzha, which is under the control of Ukraine's military. The reporters include Nick Paton Walsh, CNN's chief international security correspondent, and two Ukrainian colleagues.

The Kremlin this week summoned a senior US diplomat in Moscow and complained about "provocative" trips by American journalists to Russian territory. Overall, Vladimir Putin has downplayed Ukraine's invasion. But more than 122,000 Russians living in the Kursk zone have fled.

Mykhailo Podolyak, an adviser to the head of Zelenskyy's office, said the Kremlin had chosen to ignore bad news. "It is unable to counter the actions of Ukrainian forces in the Kursk region. To quell the growing anxiety among the population, our army's advance and the loss of territory is being presented as a 'new normal'," he wrote on X.

The Amazon

Trial of basic income for Indigenous people

Page 27

Lovebirds

Gay penguin mourned in song by partner

Page 29



West Bank

Economy and daily life stifled by restrictions

Bethan McKernan and
Sufian Taha Hebron

At al-Salam glass and ceramics factory on the outskirts of Hebron, the glassblowing furnace and the potter's wheel are no longer in daily use; the room where artists decorate bowls and tiles with the traditional blues, yellows and reds of the Palestinian craft is sometimes empty.

The glass panes of one window and a door now bear bullet holes. Israeli soldiers at a nearby checkpoint fired live bullets at teenagers and young men throwing stones in an altercation a few weeks ago, said the factory's owner, Sami al-Nader.

Hebron, a city in the south of the occupied West Bank, is a long way from Gaza. But violence between Palestinians and the Israeli army and settlers in the West Bank has reached a level not seen for 20 years, and new restrictions such as road closures, lockdowns and the cancellation of thousands of Israeli work permits are suffocating the economy and daily life.



'My family has owned the factory more than 70 years. I do not want it to close under my watch.'

Sami al-Nader

◀ A man at work at al-Salam glass and ceramics factory on the outskirts of Hebron

PHOTOGRAPHS, QUIQUE KIERSENBAUM, THE GUARDIAN



▲ Women at work in the factory, which used to receive many tourists



▲ Glassblowing at the factory, which has suffered from a collapse in orders

"The pandemic does not compare to what our business is going through now. We used to welcome tourists every day, and now, if we are lucky, we sell things on Saturdays only. We are not even getting online orders, because no one in Palestine has any money," said Nader, 47. "My family has owned the factory for more than 70 years. I do not want it to close under my watch."

For better or worse, the Israeli and Palestinian economies are deeply intertwined: Israel relies on cheaper Palestinian labour, particularly in construction and agriculture, and before the war higher Israeli wages generated an estimated 20% of the GDP of the Palestinian Authority. In 2022, these workers contributed £3.05bn to the Palestinian economy, two-thirds of the authority's budget.

But after the Hamas attacks of

7 October, Israel suspended entry for about 140,000 Palestinian workers from the West Bank. Only a fraction of those have since been restored, and Israel is trying to plug the gap with labourers from India.

As a result, unemployment and poverty in the West Bank have soared, putting the already unstable territory on the brink of a financial crash and fuelling unrest. In the West Bank's refugee camps, set up after the creation of Israel in 1948 and even today still slum-like, young men told the Guardian that militant groups such as Hamas and Palestinian Islamic Jihad were the only employers they could find.

Unemployment in the first quarter of 2024 was up 11% to 35% year on year, according to the International Labour Organization.

Inflation is up, the authority has slashed salaries and cut workers, and Israel's far-right

finance minister, Bezalel Smotrich, is withholding tax funds to the it as a punitive measure for its cooperation with the international criminal court in The Hague. He has also repeatedly threatened to cut off Palestinian banks from the international banking system, which would cause the authority to collapse altogether.

"All Israeli administrations use the stick and the carrot with the PA, but the current government is pursuing particularly contradictory policies. Israel needs the PA to maintain security in the West Bank and protect settlers but they are leveraging what they can," said Tahani Mustafa, a senior Palestine analyst at the Crisis Group thinktank.

"The other logic is that of collective punishment: although it's not worked in the past they seem to still believe that if you impose an economic siege, and a siege on movement, and squeeze the people enough, they will obey."

In Nahalin, a village south of Jerusalem, father and son Mahmood and Yaqoub Dadouh, both skilled stone workers, now spend most of their days on projects in the garden. The lights are off in Mahmood's kitchen and bathroom materials warehouse next door; he used to mainly supply Israelis from the nearby settlement of Beitar Illit, but not a single customer has come for almost a year.

Yaqoub, a father of two girls, said he was owed 16,000 shekels (£3,300) from a project in Israel that was cancelled after 7 October. The contractor refuses to take his calls.

"We've already sold all the gold, the jewellery. It was heartbreaking asking my wife to do that," said Yaqoub, 29. "I think we can manage with our savings for another two months. After that I have no idea what we are going to do."

Israel and Hamas play down US optimism on Gaza ceasefire deal

Bethan McKernan
Jerusalem

US officials yesterday expressed optimism that a ceasefire deal in the war in Gaza "is in sight", despite growing indications from Israel and Hamas that a breakthrough is not imminent and as renewed fighting rages in parts of the Palestinian territory.

Washington has put pressure on both parties to accept a bridging proposal put forward during internationally mediated talks in Qatar last week, dispatching the secretary of state, Antony Blinken, on his ninth visit to the region since the conflict broke out 10 months ago. The latest round of talks - in which Hamas is not directly participating - were scheduled to restart in Cairo yesterday but appeared to have been postponed.

Hamas has said the latest proposal on the table veers too closely to Israel's demands but characterised comments made by the US president, Joe Biden, on Tuesday that it was backing away from an agreement as "misleading".

Israel's prime minister, Benjamin Netanyahu, has reportedly refused to countenance an Israeli withdrawal from the Netzarim corridor that now bisects the Gaza Strip, or the Egypt-Gaza border - a red line for Hamas and for Cairo.

The Israeli newspaper Yedioth Ahronoth quoted "officials knowledgeable about the negotiations" as saying "the chances for a deal are slim" but that attempts were being made to hold talks in Cairo today and tomorrow. It said, quoting the same source, that Netanyahu insisted on an Israeli army "presence along the

Philadelphi corridor" on the Gaza Strip's only border with Egypt and that the US "demanded a significant withdrawal of troops" in two stages.

The paper said "the Americans understood the mistake" made by Blinken when he announced during his visit to Israel that Netanyahu had accepted a US proposal to bring the two sides closer together and that "the ball was now in Hamas's court".

Yet Linda Thomas-Greenfield, the US ambassador to the UN, told the security council yesterday that an agreement "now is in sight", after a phone call late on Wednesday in which Biden pressed Netanyahu on agreeing to a deal.

In the call between the leaders, in which the vice-president and presumptive Democratic nominee, Kamala Harris, also took part, the US leader stressed to his Israeli counterpart "the urgency of bringing the ceasefire and hostage release deal to closure and discussed upcoming talks in Cairo to remove any remaining obstacles", a White House statement said.

The renewed push for talks is seen as more vital than ever after the 31 July back-to-back assassinations of a top Hezbollah commander and Ismail Haniyeh, Hamas's political chief. The killings in Beirut and Tehran, which the Lebanese group and Iran have blamed on Israel, threaten to transform the war in Gaza into a region-wide conflict.

It is hoped that a ceasefire in Gaza would lower the temperature in the Middle East and dissuade Iran and Hezbollah from retaliatory action. Israel and the powerful Lebanese militia have traded intense rocket

fire over the past two days and tensions on the "blue line" that separates Israel and Lebanon have steadily escalated since Hezbollah began firing on Israel a day after the 7 October attack that triggered the war.

On the ground, Gaza's civil defence agency said at least three people were killed and 10 children wounded in an Israeli strike on Wednesday on a school-turned-shelter in Gaza City.

Israeli troops and tanks are also pressing deeper into areas of the central and southern Gaza Strip as they battle Hamas fighters who have regrouped. Approximately 170,000 displaced people have been forced to flee once again, including from areas previously designated as humanitarian "safe zones".

Aid agencies say the remaining humanitarian zones are already too full to accommodate new arrivals.

Violence has also escalated in the Israeli-occupied West Bank, where the health ministry said three people were killed in an Israeli airstrike on a house in the Tulkarem refugee camp in the early hours of yesterday.



▲ Mourners with a relative killed by Israeli bombing in Gaza yesterday

Thousands of Rohingya fleeing Myanmar as rebel army attacks

Kaamil Ahmed

Thousands of Rohingya are being forced to flee from Myanmar and escape on dangerous boat journeys after being targeted by armed rebels, activists and officials say.

Having seized control of much of Rakhine state from the military, the rebel Arakan Army has turned on the Rohingya minority in areas it controls, shelling villages, forcing people to leave their homes and reportedly rounding up groups of men.

A UN official said precise numbers could not be verified but that thousands of Rohingya had fled the townships of Maungdaw and Buthidaung in recent weeks.

Rohingya activists in the Nayapara refugee camp in Bangladesh said they had found the bodies of three people washed up on the banks of the Bangladeshi side of the Naf River, which forms the border with Myanmar, on Tuesday, while dozens have more have been recovered in recent weeks.

Many villagers ran to nearby rivers in the hope of escaping by boat,

either to Rakhine's capital, Sittwe, or across the border to Bangladesh, where 1 million Rohingya refugees have been living since Myanmar's military regime first launched attacks on the Muslim minority in 2017.

The UN official said it appeared that a coordinated attack took place on 5 August. Rohingya from several villages were forced from their homes to a riverbank by Arakan Army fighters, where they were then targeted by explosive-laden drones.

Abdus Sukkur, from Maungdaw, arrived in Bangladesh in mid-August after one of his sons was killed in the attack. "The Arakan Army used drones to drop bombs on us, so we had to run from our homes and come to Bangladesh," he said. "I couldn't even perform a funeral prayer for my son because we had to run so quickly from the horror."

The UN official said there had been attempts by international mediators to contact the Arakan Army after previous reports of aggression, including sieges of villages that prevented the Rohingya from working or farming, but the drone attacks on 5 August marked an escalation in hostilities.



▲ Bangladeshi security forces and Rohingya on the Naf River in July

"This isn't just a matter of Rohingya being caught between the Arakan Army and the military," the official said. "This is different: this is the Arakan Army targeting Rohingya specifically as the military is completely driven out."

Bangladesh has returned many of the boats that have arrived from Myanmar but others have managed to get through as security forces are overstretched after weeks of unrest surrounding the resignation of the prime minister, Sheikh Hasina.

The head of Bangladesh's new interim government, Muhammad Yunus, said it would continue to support the refugees.

"We need the sustained efforts of the international community for Rohingya humanitarian operations and their eventual repatriation to their homeland, Myanmar, with safety, dignity and full rights," Yunus said.

Bangladesh has enforced harsh measures on Rohingya refugees, restricting work, travel and education in an effort to encourage their return to Myanmar. However, attempts to repatriate them have failed because of a lack of guarantees for their safety. Conditions have worsened as the Arakan Army battles the military for control of Rakhine.

Myanmar's military has forcibly conscripted Rohingya to fight against the Arakan Army, while the Arakan Army has attacked the Rohingya, accusing them of collaborating with the military.

The expulsion of 700,000 Rohingya from Myanmar in 2017 was the culmination of decades of violence and persecution against the ethnic minority, which the US has concluded was genocide. About 500,000 Rohingya are estimated to remain in Myanmar, and activists fear the latest violence could lead to even more being forced from their homes.

Tun Khin, the president of the Burmese Rohingya Organisation UK rights group, said: "These are not isolated incidents – they are part of a systematic campaign of violence and terror that must be stopped. The Rohingya cannot endure another tragedy while the world remains silent."

Spanish judge calls for end to social media hate crime anonymity

Stephen Burgen
Barcelona

A Spanish judge has called for an end to social media anonymity after a wave of online disinformation that followed the killing of an 11-year-old boy.

Miguel Ángel Aguilar, a judge from the court that handles hate crimes and discrimination, wants to oblige platforms to reveal the true identity of users in cases of suspected hate crime so that the law can impose digital restraining orders.

The move comes after the killing last Sunday of a boy in a village near Toledo in central Spain. He was playing football with friends when a man with his face concealed by a scarf ran on to the field and stabbed him numerous times.

In an echo of the disinformation that followed the murder of three young girls in Southport in the north of England last month, posts appeared on social media almost immediately falsely linking the attack to immigration and in particular to so-called *menas* [unaccompanied minors], the majority of them from north Africa.

The police have since arrested a 20-year-old Spanish man. He was visiting his father in the village and is thought to have mental health problems.

Aguilar said in a television interview on Wednesday that purveyors of hate speech should be identified and that social media platforms should be forced to reveal their true identity if the judiciary requested it.

"Creating a climate of stigmatisation via social media can translate into acts of violence in the street," he said. "When a crime is committed on social media we must be able to identify the source."

"It would be interesting to see how people behave on social media if they know they can be identified, and especially if the judiciary wants to know who they are."

Aguilar pointed to a case in 2019 when a YouTuber in Barcelona was sentenced to 15 months for posting a humiliating video of homeless person. He was ordered to pay the victim €20,000 (£17,000).

In what was the equivalent of a digital restraining order, the offender was also banned from using YouTube.

"This is the precedent," Aguilar said. "Now it's important that it becomes legislation."

Spain introduced a wide-ranging anti-discrimination law in 2022, but Aguilar conceded it was difficult to define when hate speech was a crime.

Spain joins a long line of countries wrestling with the issue of online anonymity. Although Aguilar's proposal is likely to receive cross-party support, it is not likely to translate into legislation any time soon.

Six cities in Africa will have more than 10m people by 2035, report finds

Rachel Savage
Southern Africa reporter

Six African cities will have more than 10 million people by 2035, with the continent's booming young population making it the world's fastest urbanising region, according to a report.

Angola's capital, Luanda, and Tanzania's commercial hub, Dar es Salaam, will join the metropolises of Cairo, Kinshasa, Lagos and Greater Johannesburg with populations of more than 10 million, the Economist Intelligence Unit said in a report on African cities.

Africa's youthful, growing cities are seen as a boundless source of creativity and innovation, but many have also been the focus of waves of protests this year amid corruption, tax rises, a lack of jobs and political classes that are more often than not regarded as out of touch.

This fast-paced urbanisation, which will result in more than half of Africans living in towns and cities by 2035, is expected to create wealth, dynamism and business opportunities, the report says.

But, it adds, "overcrowding, informal settlements, high unemployment, poor public services,



▲ The soaring young population in Africa makes it the world's fastest urbanising region

PHOTOGRAPH: UNIVERSAL IMAGES GROUP/GETTY

stretched utility services and exposure to climate change are just some of the major challenges that city planners will have to grapple with."

By 2035, on top of the six megacities, the continent will have 17 urban areas with more than 5 million people and about another 100 with more than 1 million.

Of the 100 largest cities by 2035, Addis Ababa is expected to grow at

an average annual rate of 10.6%, followed by Kampala, Dar es Salaam and Abidjan at above or near 9%.

The continent's urban population is forecast to reach almost 1 billion by 2035, up from about 650 million last year. East Africa is expected to be the region with the fastest growing urban population, followed by central Africa and west Africa.

The EIU said "megapolises in the making" include a 370-mile stretch of west Africa's coast from Abidjan, in Ivory Coast, east through Ghana, Togo and Benin to Lagos, in Nigeria, which "could become one of the

world's largest urban corridors by 2035", with more than 50 million people.

Other potential megapolises it identified centre on Cairo and Alexandria in Egypt; Johannesburg and Pretoria in South Africa; a "Great Lakes city hub" encompassing Nairobi in Kenya, and Kampala in Uganda; and clusters in Morocco and Algeria.

The UN estimates that Africa's population will almost double in the next 30 years, to 2.2 billion. About 70% of the population is under the age of 30.

Seed capital Income plan for Indigenous people helps lives and trees

Graeme Green

At the beginning, there was a lot of fear and disbelief," said Ketty Marcelo. "There was a perception from the communities that this was another scam, that it was only looking to steal information or our integrity."

Indigenous communities in the Amazon have grown weary of outsiders arriving with plans that could mean them losing their land or way of life. When a team from Cool Earth, a climate action NGO, came to the Amazon communities of central Peru in October 2022, locals were hesitant. "These fears caused some families not to participate," Marcelo said. "And we, as an organisation, were afraid this would be another project that would seek to impose activities without respecting the autonomy of the communities."

But what developed instead was a collaboration between Cool Earth and two all-female Indigenous-led organisations – the National Organisation of Andean and Amazonian Indigenous Women of Peru (Onamiap), of which Marcelo is president, and the Organisation for Indigenous Women of the Central Selva of Peru (Omiaasec).

Together, they created a groundbreaking basic income pilot project to give £2 a day – with no strings attached – to 188 people across three Asháninka and Yánesha communities in the Avireni-Vraem reserve.

Isabel Felandro, the global head of programmes for Cool Earth, who leads the organisation's work

"It's the world's first basic income pilot for Indigenous peoples who live in rainforests"
Isabel Felandro

▲ Indigenous leaders walk through the Amazon rainforest in Peru. Right, an Asháninka community that is being helped

PHOTOGRAPHS:
COOL EARTH

in Peru, said: "It's the world's first basic income pilot for Indigenous peoples who live in rainforests with a link to protect the forest and fight the climate crisis."

"There are other basic income initiatives but most are focused on humanitarian or social issues. In the communities we work with, their activities are very linked to the protection of the forest."

"Poverty is the biggest driver of deforestation in these areas. These communities in very remote areas not only face a lack of access to basic needs – healthcare, food, education – but on top of that they

face the climate crisis. There are more fires in the forest and more droughts. There are also a lot of illegal economies going into these places: illegal logging, illegal mining and drug cartels. Growing drugs is one of the main drivers of deforestation in the areas of the Amazon where we work."

"When people are in urgent need and want to take their children for medical care or to school, sometimes these cycles of poverty lead them to take on roles in those illegal activities, or to sell their land or allow their trees to be cut down. Giving them financial support

gives them a choice to have a more sustainable way of living."

The first cash transfer was made in November 2023. A total of 188 people each receive the equivalent of about £2 a day, or about £55 a month. Cool Earth worked with a tech company, AidKit, to facilitate the process, and the pilot will last for two years, with an equivalent of about £245,000 given in total, though the organisation plans to continue the support.

Three communities were selected because they were known to have an interest in conservation and reforestation. But every individual who receives the money is free to spend it how they choose. Giving money direct to individuals is seen as faster and more cost-effective than setting up long-term community projects.

Before the pilot, nine out of 10 people in the communities reported struggling with a lack of food, and early monitoring shows that has improved. Families have also been able to invest money and dedicate more time to growing crops (cacao, cassava, coffee) for food or to sell. "We're seeing very positive spending," Felandro said.

"It's mostly to cover basic needs like food, healthcare or sending their kids to school. Some people are already buying seeds and investing in reforestation – they worry about droughts, so they're reforesting around the spring to maintain their water supply – a communal activity. Fewer families are facing financial stress. With poverty, they had to prioritise other things. But now they can do more conservation activities and rainforest restoration."

Anahis, a 20-year-old Asháninka woman, is using her money to complete her computer science studies while cultivating coffee on a small plot. "I used the first transfer to help my mum to make some purchases: mattresses, utensils, gas," she said. "I also pay my monthly tuition fees. The pilot's been very good. Trees are no longer being cut down."

Cool Earth hopes the pilot will inspire others to replicate the model and establish basic income programmes for rainforest communities around the world. It is exploring future collaborations in Papua New Guinea and in the Congo basin in Africa.

Brazil sends 1,400 firefighters to combat Amazon forest blazes

Jonathan Watts
Global environment editor

The Brazilian government has deployed more than 1,400 firefighters to the Amazon as the most severe drought in decades is turning the rainforest's usually moist vegetation into kindling and flames.

Despite a sharp decrease in



▲ The fires in the Amazon rainforest have affected 10 Brazilian states

deforestation since the president, Lula da Silva, took power in 2023, the forest has suffered 59,000 fires this year, the highest number since 2008, according to satellite data from the National Institute for Space Research.

The unusually early fire season has engulfed the city of Porto Velho in smoke, prompting medical concerns about its 540,000 inhabitants.

In June, there were devastating fires in another of Brazil's great biomes, the Pantanal wetlands, which were made at least four times more likely and 40% more intense by human-caused climate disruption, according to a study.

Brazil's environment minister, Marina Silva, also blamed human-caused global heating and a "worsening of climate change" for the fires. "We had a period of El Niño, changes in the temperature of different regions, warming of the oceans – a series of issues that are aggravating the problems," she said.

The government announced on Wednesday that it has mobilised 1,489 firefighters to combat the latest fires, which have affected 10 Brazilian states.

The Amazon basin drought has been the worst in at least two decades. In July, the National Water and

Sanitation Agency declared a critical water scarcity situation along the Madeira and Purus rivers. Many regions have recorded unusually low rainfall since last year. More than a third of the Amazon rainforest is struggling to recover from drought, according to a recent study that warned of a "critical slowing down" of this globally important ecosystem.

The signs of weakening resilience raise concerns that the world's greatest tropical forest – and biggest terrestrial carbon sink – is degrading towards a point of no return after four supposedly "one-in-a-century" dry spells in less than 20 years.



Fears grow for female political prisoners in Iran after executions

Deepa Parent
Annie Kelly

There are fears for the fates of women's rights activists imprisoned in Iran after a surge in executions since the election of Iran's new president, Masoud Pezeshkian, in July.

At least 87 people were reportedly executed in July, with another 29 executed on one day this month. The mass executions included that of Reza Rasaei, a young man sentenced to death for his participation in the Woman, Life, Freedom protests.

Human rights organisations fear further executions in the lead-up to the second anniversary of Mahsa Amini's death in custody and the nationwide protests that followed. Amini, 22, had been arrested for allegedly violating Iran's strict dress code before she died in September 2022.

About 70 women are now reported to be held as political prisoners in the notorious Evin prison, including

two who have been given death sentences: the Iranian Kurdish journalist Pakshshah Azizi and the industrial engineer and women's rights activist Sharifeh Mohammadi. Two more activists, Varisheh Moradi and Nasim Gholami Simiyari, have been given the same charges but are still to learn if they will be sentenced to death.

The Center for Human Rights in Iran (CHRI) said multiple female political prisoners were at risk of executions based on "sham charges".

"Faced with a women's movement in Iran that refuses to back down, Islamic Republic authorities are now trying to threaten these women with the gallows, in a desperate attempt to silence dissent," said Hadi Ghaemi, the executive director of CHRI.

The family of Narges Mohammadi, the Nobel peace prize winner and celebrated activist, said she was among the women at Evin prison who were reportedly injured after being beaten by guards for staging a protest in the yard against Rasaei's execution.



▲ Iran's notorious Evin prison is reported to be holding about 70 female political prisoners

PHOTOGRAPH: MORTEZA NIKOLBAZI/REUTERS

The family put out a statement saying that after the protests on 6 August, the women's ward was flooded with prison guards and security agents, and an order was issued to assault the protesters. Several women who stood in front of the security forces were severely beaten. The family said they were told Narges had collapsed and fainted after being repeatedly punched by guards.

Azizi and Sharifeh Mohammadi were sentenced to death in July on charges of "armed rebellion against the state". Azizi, a 40-year-old Kurdish women's rights activist and social worker, was reportedly subjected to torture during interrogations. In a letter written from Evin, published by the Hengaw Organization for Human Rights NGO, she said she was tortured, subjected to mock executions and put in solitary confinement.

Zeinab Bayazidi, a former political prisoner and Azizi's friend, told the Guardian that the death penalties against women and ethnic minorities

were designed to dismantle the unified fight against the regime.

"The Islamic Republic is [taking revenge against] the Woman, Life, Freedom revolution that spanned all borders from Kurdistan to Balochistan and Tehran, and caused solidarity and empathy and a revolution at this level, which has been unprecedented so far," she said.

Sharifeh Mohammadi, 45, was arrested at her home in Rasht in December 2023, according to human rights activists. A close family member said they were shocked and had "never imagined Sharifeh would be issued a death sentence".

They said Sharifeh was "shocked" after being hopeful of bail and added: "Women have been among the strongest individuals standing against the regime during the Woman, Life, Freedom movement. I believe by sentencing Sharifeh and others, they're taking revenge."

A UN fact-finding mission on Iran this month said minorities in Iran had been disproportionately affected by a "striking surge in executions since the September 2022 protests", with several death sentences rendered most recently against women of ethnic minority backgrounds.

Activists warned the repression of female activists was also evident through long-term prison sentences based on fabricated charges and forced confessions.

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The Guardian Weekly

Waddle we do now? Sea Life penguins mourn loved-up Sphen

Emily Wind

There wasn't a dry eye among staff at Sydney's Sea Life aquarium as Magic and his fellow gentoo penguins cried out, mourning the loss of Sphen in an emotional scene never before witnessed by employees.

Sphen, whose same-sex love story with Magic made the couple globally famous, appeared to die of natural causes as he approached his 12th birthday, the aquarium said yesterday.

Penguin keeper Renee Howell witnessed the couple's love story from the beginning, and said their impact as a worldwide symbol of equality was "immeasurable".

"It's one in a million," she said. "You never really will get to see this again."

Sphen and Magic's relationship began the same way as many other species, including humans, with courtship. Penguins will typically bow or sing to one another during this time, but gentoos are unique in that they will collect and present pebbles to each other.

Howell said: "You see [penguins] searching along the beach, along the ice, looking for those perfect pebbles to give to their partners. They will use those pebbles to build their nest and that is where they will lay the eggs."

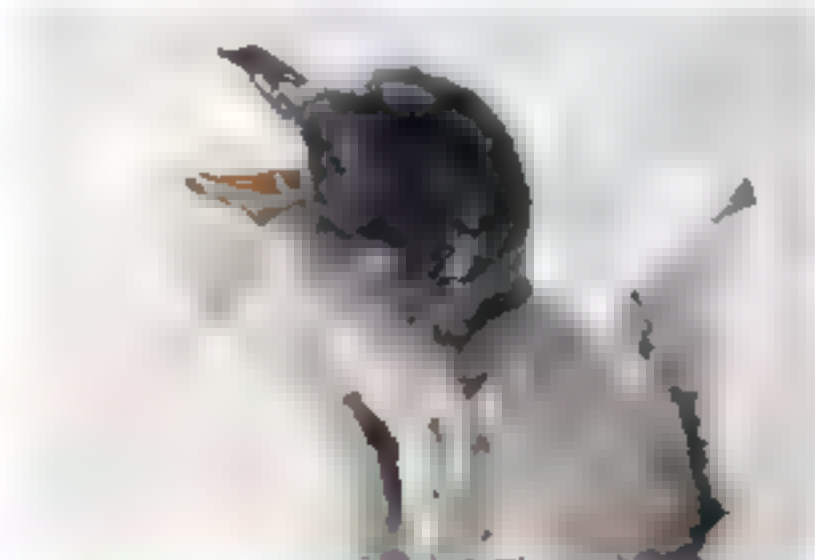
Sphen and Magic shot to fame in 2018 when news of their same-sex male relationship in the aquarium made global headlines. They had just celebrated six years together and successfully adopted and raised two chicks: Sphengic (Lara) in 2018



▲ The love story of Sphen, right, and his male mate Magic featured in films, books and documentaries around the world

PHOTOGRAPH: SYDNEY SEA LIFE AQUARIUM

▼ Sphen and Magic's first adopted chick as a couple was Sphengic (Lara), who was born in 2018. The pair took turns to go to search for food or stay to look after her



"It was a very beautiful moment, the air was just filled with their singing"

Renee Howell
Penguin keeper

and Clancy in 2020. Their love story inspired a Mardi Gras float, was included in the New South Wales education syllabus and featured in the Netflix series *Atypical*.

Countless books include their love story and documentaries on same-sex animal couples have featured them, the aquarium said.

Howell said that same-sex partnerships are thought to be common among penguins, but what was different with Sphen and Magic was how they shared their parental duties.

"They took their individual [turns] on the nest, and they would go out and search for food, and then they'd come back and swap the care of the egg," she said. "They definitely divided up the roles really quite evenly between the two."

In the wild when one penguin dies and their partner does not know what has happened, they will typically go searching for them. Howell said this was why aquarium keepers felt it was necessary to show Magic that Sphen had died, so he could understand "his partner wouldn't actually be returning".

The keeper said it was a very emotional moment when Magic was taken to Sphen, alongside the gentoo colony and all of the staff. Magic

immediately started singing, with all the penguins around him joining in the chorus.

"It was a very beautiful moment, the air was just filled with their singing," Howell said. "It showed the impact [Sphen] had on his partner and that [Magic] actually recognised that his partner was there."

"Soon after, he became quite protective of his partner and that was a very emotional time for us, but we needed to do that in order for him to hopefully comprehend what had happened."

Howell said staff had not seen anything like this, so they are not sure what the singing means. "But in that moment for us, it was a beautiful send-off."

Magic is entering his first breeding season without his partner, but is still collecting pebbles for a nest – a promising sign.

Knowing the impact Sphen had is providing comfort to the entire team, who share strong bonds with the animals, Howell said.

"To us, they weren't just penguins. They all have their individual quirks and personalities, so it is definitely sad losing one of those members," she added. "They inspired so many people across the world."

'Extraordinary' 2,492-carat raw diamond discovered at Botswana mine

Rachel Savage

A 2,492-carat raw diamond discovered in Botswana could be the second-largest gem-quality example ever unearthed.

The Canadian mining company Lucara Diamond Corp said it had recovered the "exceptional" stone from its Karowe mine, with a photo showing the hefty rough diamond sitting in the cupped palm of a hand.

The largest gem-quality diamond ever discovered was the 3,106 carat Cullinan diamond, which was mined in South Africa in 1905 when it was still a British colony and given to King Edward VII. It was cut up into several gems, some of which are now part of the crown jewels.

Lucara's president, William Lamb, said: "We are ecstatic about the recovery of this extraordinary 2,492-carat diamond."

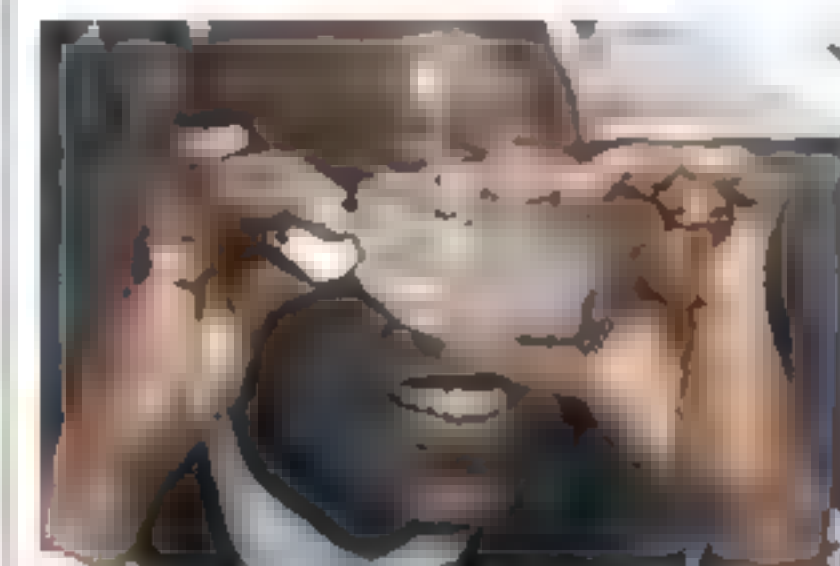
He did not say what its value was or if it could be cut into gems. Botswana's government said it was the biggest diamond discovered there.

Lucara's Karowe mine has been yielding progressively bigger stones. In 2019, the company dug out the 1,758-carat Sewelo diamond, then the world's second-biggest mined diamond. Louis Vuitton bought it for an undisclosed sum despite its black appearance and it being unclear how many gems could be cut from it. Another Karowe diamond, the 1,111-carat Lesedi La Rona, was bought by a UK jeweller for \$53m (£40m) in 2017.

The largest diamond ever found was the black Sergio stone, which was discovered above ground in Brazil in 1895 and cut up to be used in industrial drills. Black "carbonado" stones such as the Sergio are thought to be parts of meteorites.

Russia is the world's largest diamond producer, but most large valuable finds have been made in Botswana in recent years. The southern African country has been trying to increase its power in the industry, negotiating a progressively bigger share of stones mined by the Anglo American-owned De Beers last year, in a new 10-year agreement.

Botswana's president, Mokgweetsi Masisi, was one of the first people to see Lucara's new, as yet unnamed, diamond before it was shown to the world, the government said.



▲ Mokgweetsi Masisi, the president of Botswana, examines the diamond

Maduro accused of 'coup' as top Venezuelan court endorses win

Tom Phillips

Latin America correspondent

Venezuela's president is facing a growing chorus of international outrage after the government-controlled supreme court endorsed his disputed claim to have won the presidential election.

Venezuela's opposition has claimed Nicolás Maduro tried to steal the 28 July election and has produced

compelling evidence that its candidate, Edmundo González, was the real winner.

Even countries such as Brazil and Colombia, whose leftwing leaders have long-standing ties to Maduro's Chavismo movement, have refused to recognise his victory until detailed voting data is published.

But yesterday Venezuela's supreme court certified Maduro's supposed triumph, which would give him another six-year term. In a

televised announcement, its president, Caryl Rodríguez, declared his re-election "indisputable" and called the court's verdict "definitive".

"Nothing will stop us in our sacred mission [of upholding the law]," said Rodríguez, who is a member of Maduro's ruling Socialist party.

The decision prompted a flood of anger, with González rejecting the verdict as "null and void".

Andrés Izarra, a former Maduro minister who lives in exile, denounced what he called "a coup". "No country will accept this judgment. And nor will the Venezuelan people," said Izarra.

Gabriel Boric, Chile's progressive president, accused Venezuela's

supreme court of "consolidating the fraud" allegedly perpetrated by Maduro after the recent election. "Chile does not recognise this false, auto-proclaimed triumph of Maduro and co," Boric wrote on X.

The president of Uruguay, Luis Lacalle Pou, said: "The Maduro regime confirms what the international community has been denouncing: fraud."

Maduro's allies lined up to be interviewed on state television to declare the election crisis over. His communications minister, Freddy Nájera, called the ruling a "happy ending" for Venezuelans. However, the move looks almost certain to further aggravate the country's crisis.

World

St Vincent and the Grenadines

Hurricane Beryl

Devastated islands face humanitarian crisis six weeks on

Natricia Duncan
Kingstown

From the outside, it looks like a typical primary school in the multi-island Caribbean nation of St Vincent and the Grenadines (SVG), with children's voices echoing behind the distinctive green walls. But inside, washing lines sag with the weight of towels and clothes, and there are people of all ages: a baby frets on her mother's hip, children squeal as they chase each other, teens play basketball, and elderly people sit on chairs chatting.

This school in the district of Calliaqua is one of 20 on the main island of St Vincent that were converted into shelters for those displaced by Hurricane Beryl, the category 5 storm that tore through the region in early July with winds of up to 120mph.

Some of the 30 people at this shelter arrived with nothing but the clothes on their backs. During the hurricane, many had spent hours hiding under beds or huddled in cupboards and bathrooms.

Six weeks on SVG has reverted to the quiet, stunning beauty that defines it. But many in the shelters remain haunted by the horror of the storm.

"A lot of people are traumatised," said the shelter manager, Josel Matthews. Some had refused to eat for days, staring off into space or breaking into sobs, she said. Some are working with counsellors provided by the government.

Though the hurricane was over, they still needed other kinds of help because they remained homeless, and their businesses and their jobs were still gone, said Kelly-Ann Neverson, a manager for another shelter in the country's capital, Kingstown.

"The challenge for them is that they have lost not just their homes but also their livelihoods. Most of them are boat captains, chefs and fishermen," she added.

Julian Mason, 37, a builder on the island of Union, where 90% of the buildings were destroyed, said: "I lost all my tools, so I have to turn down work. That's my biggest problem right now."

Susan Jacobs, 52, lost her home and the restaurant and bar that supported her family. Now her greatest need is "a foundation to build on, to work on, where I can feed myself and my family".

The hurricane had etched new landscapes, said Jacobs. "Where I've lived for years, I have never before been able to see the ocean from my house until the morning after Beryl," she said.

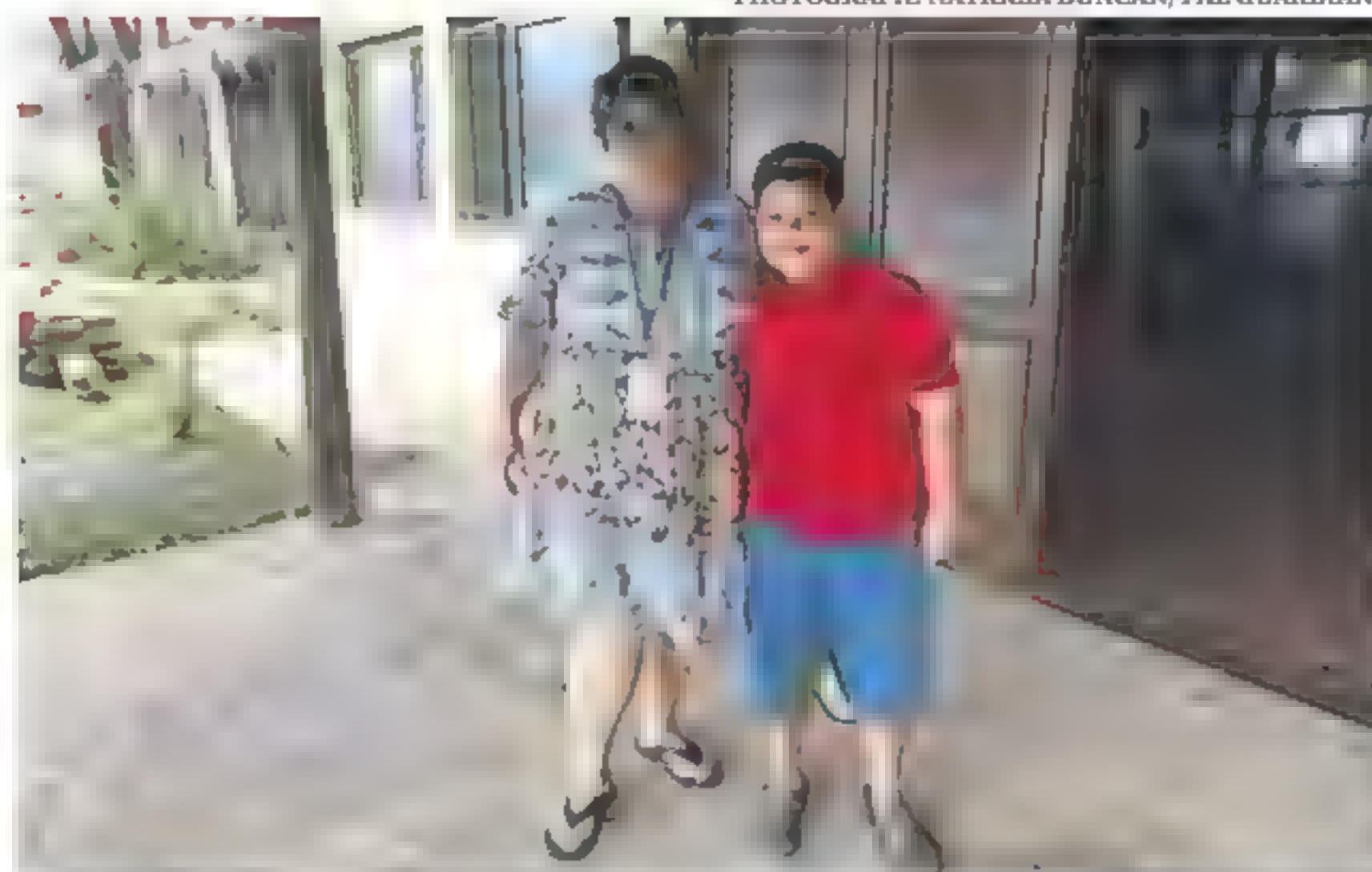
Many people from Union, Mayreau and Canouan, the SVG islands that bore the brunt of Beryl's wrath, are still living in shelters on St Vincent, with schools, churches and private homes hosting hundreds of families. But some are toughing it out in the Grenadine islands despite having no running water, limited electricity and temporary tarpaulin roofs that leak when it rains. Many of them are involved in the rebuilding effort.

On Canouan, Rania Sassin, the station manager for the SVG Air airline, is volunteering her time and vehicle to help government officials on assessment visits. She is also supporting her eight-year-old son, who was locked in a cupboard for hours during the hurricane and is now frightened whenever it rains.

His fears of another hurricane are shared by many on Canouan. "It's a bit scary. We used to love it when it rained in the Grenadines because rain is a blessing to us as

▼ Canouan resident Rania Sassin with her eight-year-old son, who was left traumatised by the hurricane

PHOTOGRAPH: NATRICIA DUNCAN/THE GUARDIAN



especially as we move into the dry season. So we are not refusing water or options for making water."

The devastation on Canouan and Mayreau is extensive and the humanitarian crisis severe, but upon landing on Union it is clear Beryl left the island almost uninhabitable. From the damaged airport - which is closed to commercial travel - to the seaport where ships are bringing in relief and supplies, the island has become a large construction site.

Amid the skeletons of gutted and precariously standing houses are mountains of zinc roofing collected from the debris and trucks ready to take them to the port to be shipped off to Trinidad for disposal.

Most of the people on the ground are army personnel, construction or aid workers. Along with the few remaining residents, they are busy trying to kickstart the long rebuilding process in a thick, oppressive heat.

David Bullock from the humanitarian organisation React, which is supporting the SVG government's response, said: "We initially came in through Canouan and saw the heartbreaking level of devastation and a requirement for humanitarian support. Then we came across to Union to find the level of devastation was enormous in comparison to what we'd just seen. That drove us very hard and created a sense of urgency."

His colleague Kirsten Bailey said they were working with organisations such as the World Central Kitchen to support the rebuilding of water systems and the provision of food and shelter.

Ralph Gonsalves, the prime minister of SVG, has repeated his calls for more support from developed countries and international financial institutions.

On a visit to the affected islands last week, he said: "We're not getting a lot of grants so we have to try and negotiate loans or take money from our taxes. The problem is our debt will increase, and then you have people who will tell you your debt is too high."

"Since 2002 this is the 12th emergency I've had to deal with. Eleven were natural disasters, including the La Soufrière volcanic eruption and, of course, Covid. But in terms of weather events, this is the tenth one."

Last month Gonsalves joined other Caribbean leaders whose islands also suffered devastation to appeal to the UK government to back a "Marshall-style plan" to rebuild their countries.

In response to their letter, Rachel Reeves, the chancellor, has pledged to work with international partners "to deliver coordinated support to help break the cycle of debt" facing vulnerable countries and to strengthen their resilience.

Some Hurricane Beryl survivors echo government concerns that more support should be given to those living on the frontline of the climate crisis.

Lavia, who lives on Union, said: "So much is being done to destroy the planet, and then these kinds of things happen. More efforts should be made to help people in our situation."

▲ The remains of a restaurant and bar on the island of Union, where 90% of the buildings were destroyed

► Devastation on the island of Union after the storm in July

PHOTOGRAPH: INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATION FOR MIGRATION/REUTERS

it's our source of water. But now when it rains we'll be like, no, not today," said Sassin.

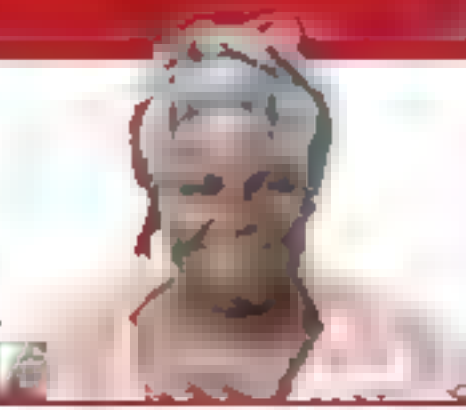
In Mayreau, the smallest inhabited Grenadine island, with a population of under 300, residents are mainly concerned about the water supply. Before the storm they had depended on rainwater runoff from galvanised steel roofs, but most of them were damaged in the storm, and most storage tanks were blown away, said Marion Isaacs, the president of the We Are Mayreau grassroots collective.

She said: "We are now in a very vulnerable position where we may not be able to store enough water,



Where I've lived for years, I have never been able to see the ocean from my house until the morning after the hurricane

Susan Jacobs
Union resident



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8288.00

All share
-0.47

4536.02

Dow Indl
182.80

40707.69

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Business

Bronfman consortium raises its last-minute bid for Paramount

Jane Croft

Paramount Global, one of Hollywood's best-known companies, has received an improved last-minute offer from a group led by the veteran media executive Edgar Bronfman Jr that could gazump its planned \$28bn (£21bn) merger with the independent film studio Skydance.

Bronfman, a former Warner Music CEO, and his consortium of investors have sweetened a proposed offer to acquire National Amusements, the vehicle that holds the media tycoon Shari Redstone's controlling stake in Paramount, which also owns CBS, Nickelodeon and the UK's Channel 5.

They are now prepared to offer \$6bn, according to the Wall Street Journal – up from the \$4.3bn that Bronfman had proposed earlier this week.

Paramount confirmed in a statement that it had received an offer

from Bronfman but did not disclose any financial details. The future of Paramount Global has been the subject of fevered speculation in Hollywood for months.

The latest proposal threatens to undo a deal agreed in early July by Skydance Media to merge Skydance with Paramount, in a complex deal that would end Paramount's links with the Redstone family.

Redstone, whose father, Sumner, bought Paramount in 1994, gave the green light to the sale of the family's controlling stake in the entertainment conglomerate, whose subsidiary Paramount Pictures has produced such classic films as *The Godfather*, *Titanic* and *Breakfast at Tiffany's*.

Skydance had agreed to invest \$8bn into the new company as part of the merger deal and pay a further \$2.4bn to buy National Amusements, the Redstone-owned movie theatre operator that holds nearly 80% of voting shares in Paramount.

The independent film production

group is led by the producer David Ellison, the son of Larry Ellison, the tech tycoon who co-founded Oracle.

However, the Skydance deal had contained a 45-day "go shop" period that allowed Paramount to solicit and evaluate other offers until a deadline of 21 August. This week Bronfman submitted his bids.

Paramount Global said in a statement that it would now extend the deal negotiation period as it engaged with the Bronfman-led investor group.

"As a result the 'go shop' period is extended for the Bronfman consortium until 5 September 2024," it said in a statement, adding there could be no assurance that the approach would result in a better offer.

£6bn

The increased offer for National Amusements from media executive Edgar Bronfman Jr's consortium

Paramount, in its latest earnings figures released this month, reported an 11% drop in revenues to \$6.8bn in the three months ending on 30 June, largely as a result of a drop in TV licensing revenues, and said it planned \$500m in annualised cost savings.

The company said Paramount+, in its direct-to-consumer division, had seen a 12% rise in revenues after year-on-year growth in US subscriber numbers and pricing increases.

Paramount+ was also helped by hit programmes such as *Knuckles*, from the *Sonic the Hedgehog* video games franchise. The programme, in which the character of *Knuckles the Echidna* is voiced by the actor Idris Elba, broke the global record for the most-streamed original series on Paramount+ in the first days of its release in April.

However, the overall number of Paramount+ subscribers fell by 2.8 million to 68 million over the quarter to 68m reflecting a planned exit from a South Korean partnership deal.

Paramount has indicated that if the Skydance deal goes ahead the transaction is expected to close in the first half of 2025 subject to regulatory approvals.

Bronfman and Skydance have been approached for comment.

PwC expects six-month China ban over audit

Amy Hawkins

Senior China correspondent

The auditor PwC China has reportedly told clients it expects to receive a six-month ban from Chinese authorities, and potentially a large fine, as a punishment for its role in auditing the collapsed property developer Evergrande.

PwC expects to be banned from conducting regulated activities in China, such as signing off on financial results, for six months starting in September, the Financial Times reported yesterday.

In March, Beijing's securities regulator said Evergrande, the world's most indebted property developer before it collapsed in January, had inflated its revenues by almost \$80bn (£61.6bn) in 2019 and 2020. Evergrande was ordered to pay a \$580m fine for the alleged fraud. Its founder, Hui Ka Yan, was detained by the authorities in September and ordered to pay a \$6.5m fine.

Evergrande's downfall led to scrutiny of PwC China, which had audited the developer's accounts for 14 years until 2023. The FT cited an unnamed former partner at PwC, which has more than 20,000 employees in mainland China, as saying: "The current partners are braced for impact."

PwC China is the most prominent of the "big four" accounting firms, a term that includes Deloitte, KPMG and EY, operating in China.

But in recent months, amid heightened scrutiny of PwC China's links to Evergrande, the auditor has been shedding clients. This week, its biggest mainland China-listed client, Bank of China, said it planned to switch to EY. China Life Insurance, China Telecom and PICC have also dropped PwC as a client.

The regulatory action on the horizon for PwC China is expected to eclipse the punishment received last year by Deloitte, which paid a \$31m fine and was suspended for three months in relation to its audit of China Huarong Asset Management.

State-owned companies in China are generally banned from hiring an auditor if it has received a significant regulatory punishment within the past three years.

In February last year it was reported that Beijing had instructed state-owned companies to phase out contracts with the big four firms, as authorities tried to address security concerns and curb the influence of western-linked auditors.

PwC China said: "Given this is an ongoing regulatory matter, it would not be appropriate to comment."

Paris Olympics provides boost for economy in eurozone

Richard Partington

Economics correspondent

The Paris Olympics has provided a boost to the eurozone economy after a sharp rise in spending as athletes and spectators descended on the French capital for the summer sporting event.

Figures from a closely watched survey of French businesses showed that private sector output rose to its highest level in 17 months. Economists said the growth in activity, fuelled by the French services sector as millions of tourists flocked to Paris for the two-and-a-half week sporting event, bolstered the figures for the entire 27-country bloc.

The eurozone's composite purchasing managers' index (PMI) conducted by the Hamburg Commercial Bank and S&P Global rose to 51.2 this month from 50.2 in July, with any reading above 50 an indication of growth.

However, experts warned that the Olympic boost masked a disappointing performance elsewhere amid a slowdown in activity across the eurozone led by a collapse in manufacturing output, particularly in Germany.



Bert Colijn, a senior economist at the Dutch bank ING, said: "Eurozone manufacturing continues to resemble Germany's performance at the Olympics: a big disappointment."

Despite the boost to the French service sector, analysts warned the underlying picture for the wider eurozone economy suggested the outlook was weak enough to warrant another interest rate cut from the European Central Bank.

Cyrus de la Rubia, the chief economist of Hamburg Commercial Bank, said: "A closer look at the

numbers reveals that the underlying fundamentals might be shakier than they appear.

"The boost largely comes from a surge in services activity in France, with the business activity index jumping by almost 5 points, likely linked to the buzz surrounding the Olympic Games in Paris. It's doubtful this momentum will carry over into the coming months, however."

De la Rubia added: "Meanwhile, the overall pace of growth in the services sector has slowed down in Germany, and the eurozone's

French business output was at its highest level in 17 months as athletes and tourists flocked to the Games

PHOTOGRAPH: TOM JENKINS/THE GUARDIAN

manufacturing sector remains in rapid decline."

Separate PMI figures for the UK showed a rise in output to the highest level in four months after a robust upturn in new orders, helped by an upbeat assessment of the domestic economic outlook by businesses. The composite output index increased from 52.8 in July to 53.4 this month.

Business view

Nils Pratley

Water activists are right about enforcement. The government's proposals are still too vague

The organisers of the March for Clean Water – that's Feargal Sharkey and River Action, supported by organisations that range from Surfers Against Sewage to the RSPB to the Women's Institute – make an excellent point: while it's nice that the government will bring a water bill to parliament, the initiatives revealed so far “are not nearly extensive enough to address the scale of the UK's water pollution crisis”.

You bet. None of four “initial steps” announced by the environment secretary, Steve Reed, last month is likely to cause sleepless nights in any boardroom. The first, to

ensure companies' funding for infrastructure investment is ringfenced, reads like a description of how the regulatory system in England and Wales was always supposed to work. One fears the second, to add the protection of customers and the environment to companies' articles of association, will be cosmetic; directors can always be fuzzy about how they interpret their fiduciary duties.

The third would create “powerful new customer panels” to “hold water bosses to account”. Really? Surely such panels' powers can only ever be minor compared with regulators'. The fourth would double compensation for customers when basic water services are affected but is “subject to consultation” and seems aimed

primarily at rare cases when water doesn't flow from the taps, rather than targeted at pollution.

In Reed's defence, he said his first steps were exactly that, and that his “special measures” regime will contain more. The yet-to-emerge detail on chunkier stuff, including personal criminal liability for water bosses and new powers for Ofwat to block the payment of bonuses, may carry more weight.

Behind it all, though, sits the basic imperative to ensure environmental laws are enforced, not just on sewage discharges but also on agricultural runoff. That is rightly one of the campaigners' core demands. It comes down to the government's appetite – or lack thereof – to back regulatory reform and fund an effective enforcement regime.

Ofwat, as the economic regulator that took a decade-plus to wake up to the size of the companies' dividend-extraction after the leveraged buyout boom of 2004-08, naturally tends to cop most of the heat for the industry's failures. But the Environment Agency (EA), overseen by Reed's department, deserves more attention.

The agency's long decline was reported in depth by this newspaper in June and a few lowlights are worth recalling.



▲ A core demand of campaigners is that laws on sewage discharge and agricultural runoff are enforced

The Environment Agency still looks miles away from being a muscular enforcer that can move swiftly and frighten polluters

Funding for environmental protection was cut by 80% between 2010 and 2021. Just 91 people out of a workforce of 13,400 were qualified to inspect the plants where sewage is treated, the new-ish chief executive, Philip Duffy, told parliament in April this year. “There was a withdrawal successively in 2009 and again in 2015 from regular investigations into compliance,” he said.

The last government gave the agency funding to recruit 500 new staff, and Duffy these days is in must-do-better mode (an improvement on his predecessor's claim, as late as 2019, that Britain's water quality is “better than at any time since the Industrial Revolution”). There is a vague sense of a corner having been turned. The investigation into sewage treatment works by the EA and Ofwat, which last month led to three firms being hit by Ofwat with provisional fines totalling £168m, was the largest ever.

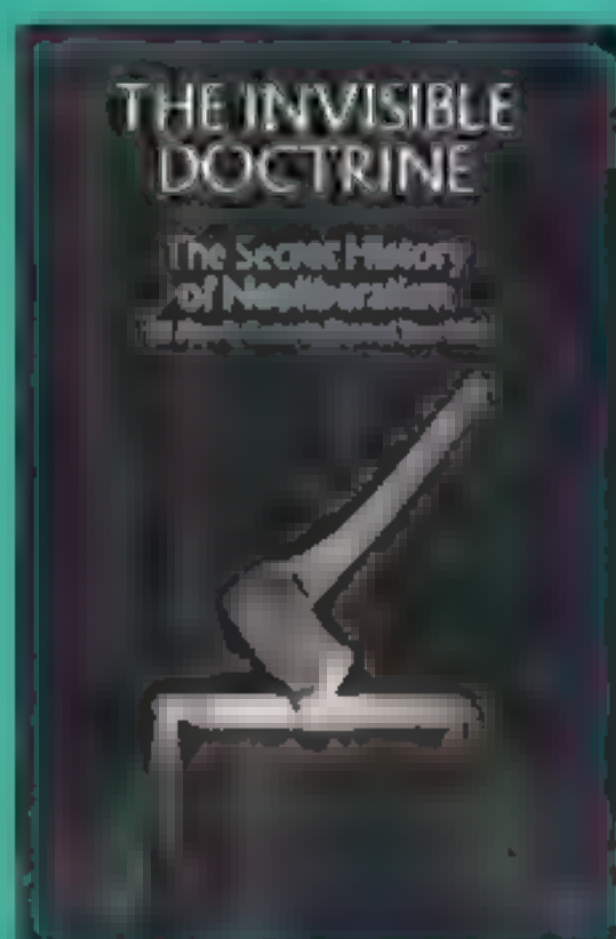
Yet the EA still looks miles away from being a muscular enforcer that can move swiftly and create fear among polluters. Does the government have a vision for such a body? If it does, hard financial commitments are required for credibility. The march on 26 October – four days before the chancellor's budget – is well timed.

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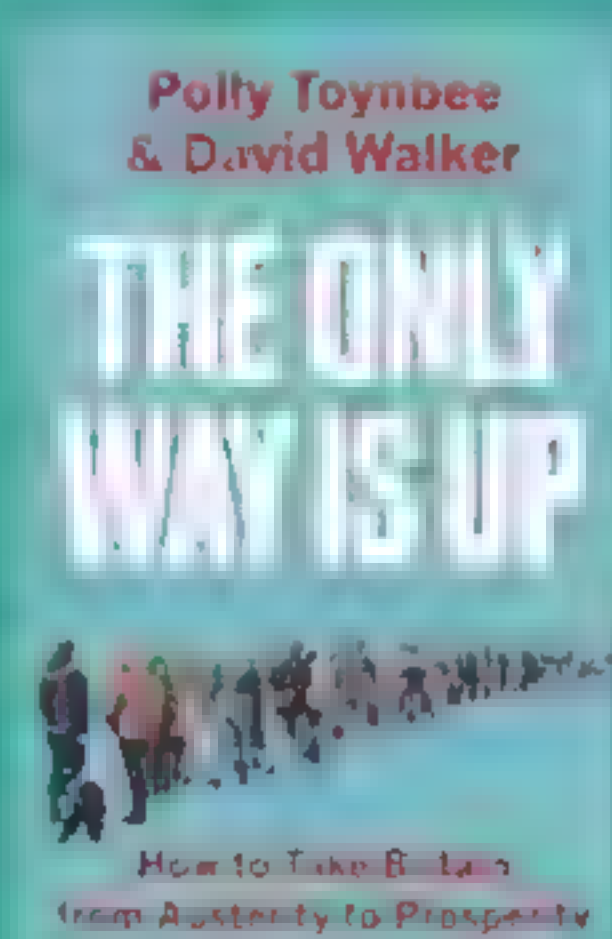
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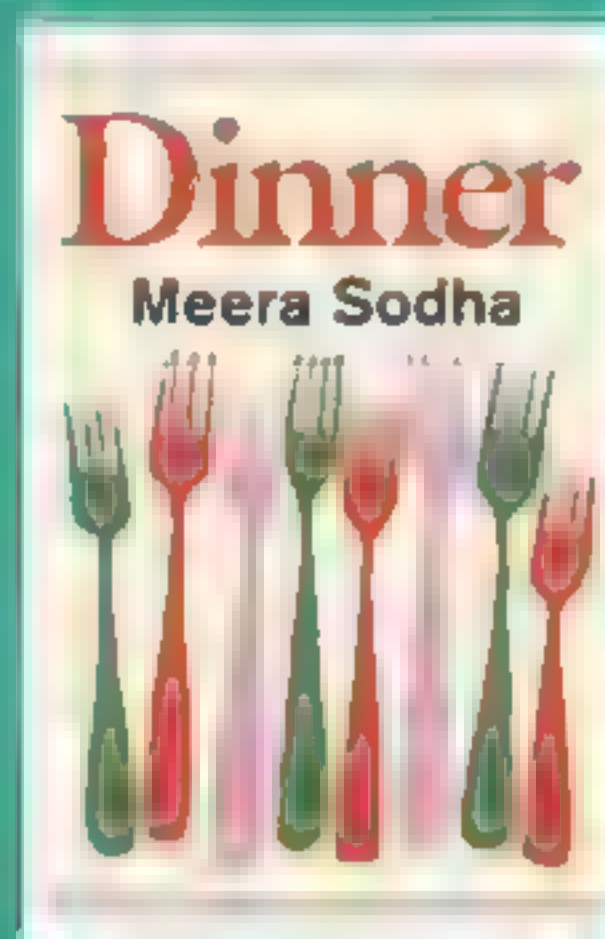
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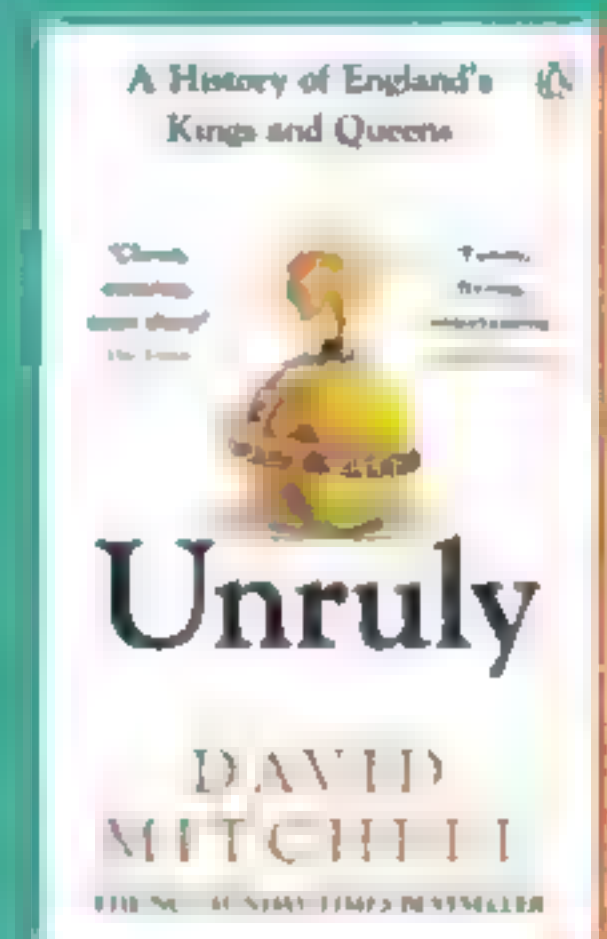
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◀ China's coal power generation fell by 7% in the year to June 2024 as the country added wind and solar power capacity

PHOTOGRAPH
QILAI SHEN/
BLOOMBERG/GETTY

Damping down coal Hopes rise as China turns slowly to cleaner power generation

Fiona Harvey
Amy Hawkins

Coal-fired power is still enjoying a construction boom in China, but a marked slowdown in the permitting of future plants has given experts hope that the world's biggest emitter may be turning a corner.

China led the world in the construction of new coal-fired power plants in the first half of 2024, with work beginning on more than 41GW of new generation capacity, data published yesterday showed. That was as much new coal power capacity as China embarked on during the whole of 2022 and represented 90% of the world's new coal plant construction so far this year.

The Chinese government has a target of bringing 80GW of new

coal-fired generation capacity online for the whole of 2024.

But while new starts surge ahead, the pipeline of future plants looks as if it could be much smaller. Only 9GW worth of power plants received permits in the first half of 2024, a reduction of 83% compared with the first half of 2023, according to a report by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) and Global Energy Monitor.

The slowdown in coal permits comes as China added as much new wind and solar generation capacity in 2023 as Britain's total electricity production from all sources.

That increase in renewable power was a key factor in driving down China's coal power generation by 7% between June 2023 and June 2024. Qi Qin, the lead author of yesterday's report and China analyst at CREA, said: "The development of clean energy enables the Chinese government to set more ambitious goals for

reducing coal power generation and carbon emissions. China needs to stop allowing room for fossil fuel emissions to grow in its policies."

Power generation is different to capacity. For political and economic reasons, new fossil fuel powered capacity can be added that is not used to its full potential; and wind and solar are intermittent resources, so the amount of electricity generated can vary.

There are strong political reasons why China might want to increase its coal capacity. The government took fright at droughts in 2022 that vastly diminished the country's hydroelectricity capacity and caused factory shutdowns, and the war in Ukraine has destabilised

energy prices globally. Coal was repositioned by Beijing as the best solution for base load power.

However, coal plants are struggling economically, according to David Fishman, a senior manager at the Lantau Group, an energy consultancy in Shanghai. He said it was no longer profitable in the long term to build coal power plants in China. "The only reason to do so would be strategic reasons," he said, for example pressure from other stakeholders, such as local government officials, who might be concerned about energy security or short-term GDP growth. "Coal power plants lose money right now. They don't have guaranteed uptake ... the ones I talk to mostly say: 'We're in pain,'" Fishman said.

The increase in renewable generation, if coupled with investments in upgrading the grid and potentially reforming the electricity market, could offer China a path to energy security

80GW

China's target for new coal-fired capacity this year – but permits are much reduced for the future

without the dominance of coal, as well as a way to cut greenhouse gas emissions sharply, analysts said.

Christine Shearer, at Global Energy Monitor, said: "The steep drop in new coal plant permits is a hopeful sign that China's massive solar and wind builds are dampening its coal ambitions. With clean power now capable of meeting the country's electricity demand growth, China should cancel its remaining coal proposals and accelerate the retirement of its existing coal plants."

Weaning China away from the dirtiest fossil fuel will require facing down the powerful coal lobby, entrenched within regional and national governing structures. Fishman said that while certain stakeholders, such as officials for coal-producing provinces such as Shaanxi, might still be pushing for continued coal use, "it's hard to see how they'll win".

"Why would you want to build this thing that not only is politically problematic but also doesn't stimulate GDP?" he asked, referring to coal-fired power plants.

For the rest of the world, these questions have acute relevance. China is the world's biggest emitter by far, responsible for more than a quarter of global carbon dioxide emissions. The government has promised that emissions will peak by 2030, but most scientists fear this is far too late to limit global temperature rises to 1.5C above preindustrial levels. For China to peak this year, or next, would still give the world a small chance of staving off climate disaster, and analysts believe that with concerted action such a peak is possible – and indeed may already have happened, according to CREA, given the surge in clean power.

China's government will not comment on this speculation, and holds fast to the pledge to peak by 2030, made by the president, Xi Jinping, in 2020. A spokesperson said China's energy strategy was based on "the principle of building the new before discarding the old".

That phrase, first used by Xi in 2022, reflects the government's desire to peak emissions in a way that also ensures energy security, something Beijing has been increasingly concerned about since the war in Ukraine and summer power outages in 2021 and 2022.

"We are exercising better control over the amount and intensity of energy consumption, particularly of fossil fuels, and transition gradually toward controlling both the amount and intensity of carbon emissions," the spokesperson said.

England's Euro run helps JD Sports beat summer sales expectations

Sarah Butler

Stronger-than-expected sales of replica England football shirts as the men's national team made it to the final of Euro 2024 helped JD Sports to beat UK trading expectations over

the summer. Shares in the retailer were up more than 8% yesterday, making the company the top riser on the FTSE 100 index, as analysts said its performance was reassuring in the light of fears about waning demand for athleisure fashion given poor performances by the big brands including Nike.

While sales at established JD Sports shops in the UK fell by 0.8% in the three months to 3 August, that was a big improvement from the 6.4% decline in the previous quarter.

As well as its eponymous global sports clothing chain, JD Sports Fashion owns the chains Finish Line and Shoe Palace in the US, Sprinter in Europe, and the UK outdoor kit retailers Blacks, Go Outdoors and Millets.

Régis Schultz, its chief executive, said the improvement in the UK partly related to easier comparatives a year earlier, when the UK's weather

was even worse than this summer's. However, he said sales of replica England kit during the Euro football championship were also much better than expected, with sales of home and away shirts selling equally.

Despite the UK being JD Sports' worst-performing region and the only one where underlying sales fell back, Schultz told the Guardian: "We feel good about the UK."

He added that the group was gaining market share in a difficult market, especially on clothing, where "the weather didn't help at all".

Schultz said JD Sports was planning on a high level of discounting in the clothing market up until Christmas as retailers tried to clear stocks after a poor summer.

Alice Price of the market research firm GlobalData said JD Sports was "facing greater threat from Sports Direct, which in recent months has elevated its brand proposition by onboarding a host of desirable brands such as Alo Yoga and On".

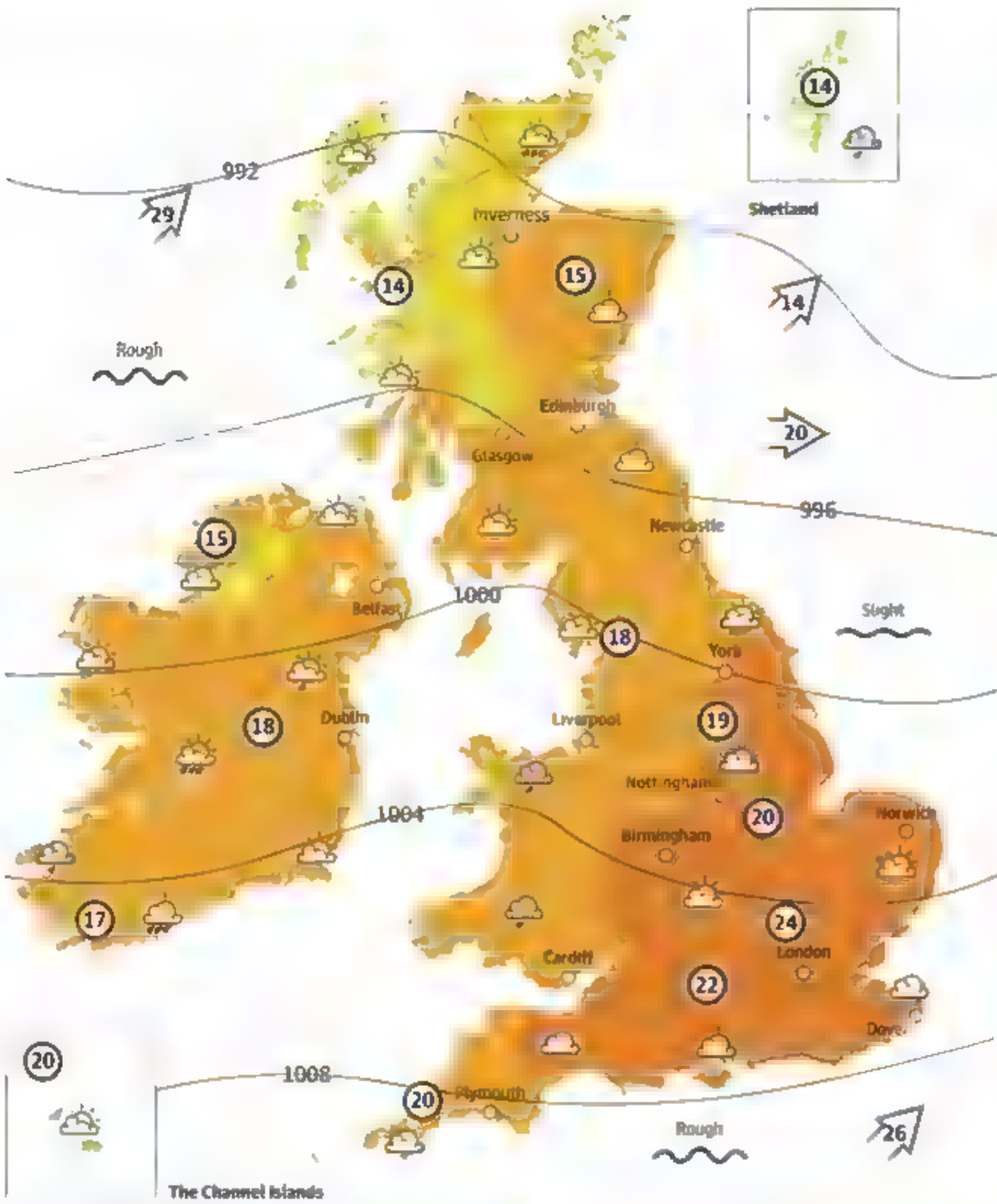
This had allowed Sports Direct to "benefit from the resilience of premium sportswear".

Weather

Friday 23 August 2024

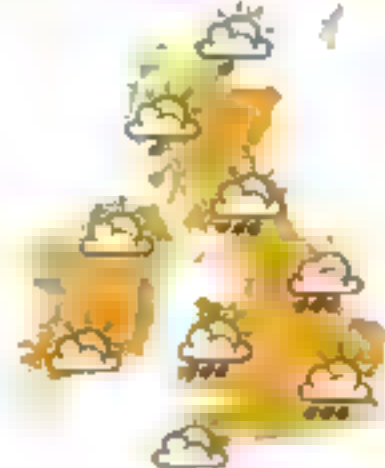
UK and Ireland Noon today

- Sunny
- Mist
- Fog
- Sunny intervals
- Hazy
- Mostly cloudy
- Overcast/dull
- Sunny showers
- Sunny and heavy showers
- Light showers
- Rain
- Sleet
- Light snow
- Snow showers
- Heavy snow
- Ice
- Thundery rain
- Thundery showers
- Temperature, °C
- Wind speed, mph
- Windy

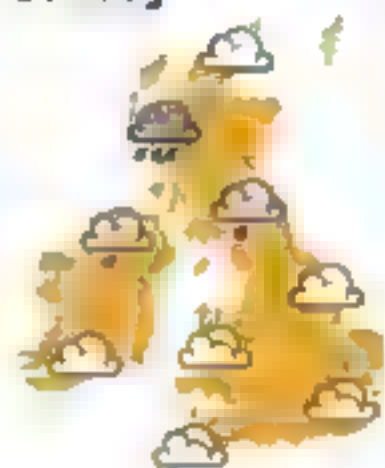


Forecast

Low High



Low High



Carbon count

Daily atmospheric CO₂ readings from Mauna Loa, Hawaii (ppm)

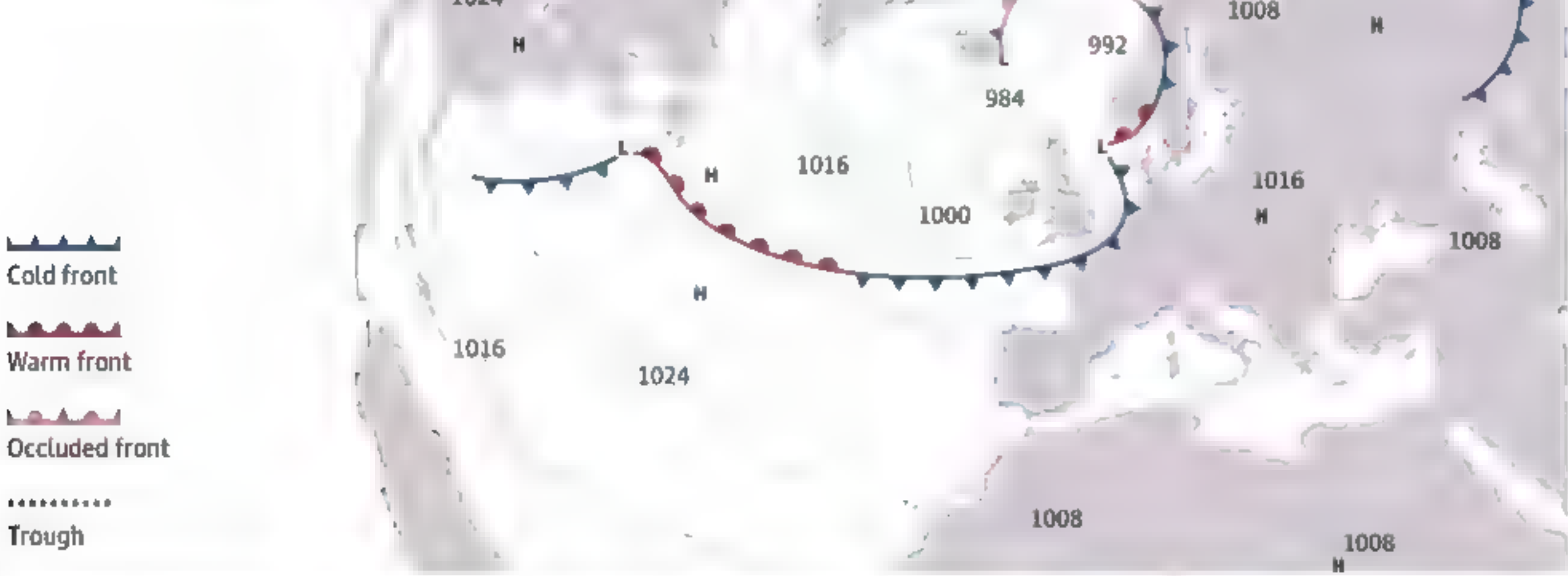
Latest	19 Aug 2024	422.89
Weekly average	11 Aug 2024	422.42
	22 Aug 2023	419.03
	22 Aug 2014	397.33
Pre-industrial base		280
Safe level		350

Source: NOAA ES&L

Around the UK

London	Lows and highs	Precipitation	Air pollution
	14 23	40%	Low
Manchester	12 18	5%	Low
Edinburgh	10 18	50%	Low
Belfast	10 16	70%	Low
Birmingham	12 20	0%	Low
Brighton	14 22	0%	Low
Bristol	13 19	5%	Low
Cardiff	13 19	10%	Low
Newcastle	10 17	20%	Low
Penzance	14 18	60%	Low

Atlantic front



High tides

Aberdeen	0416	4.7m	1657	4.3m
Avonmouth	1039	13.6m	2256	13.7m
Barrow	0220	10.0m	1449	9.4m
Belfast	0156	3.8m	1430	3.4m
Cobh	0841	4.1m	2104	4.1m
Cromer	0931	5.5m	2224	4.9m
Dover	0201	6.8m	1422	7.1m
Dublin	0216	4.4m	1455	4.0m
Galway	0825	5.2m	2042	5.4m
Greenock	0327	3.8m	1555	3.3m
Harwich	0256	4.2m	1504	4.2m
Holyhead	0112	6.1m	1341	5.6m
Hull	0922	8.2m	2159	7.5m
Leith	0534	6.0m	1810	5.7m
Liverpool	0204	10.0m	1430	9.4m
London Bridge	0507	7.3m	1721	7.3m
Lossiemouth	0244	4.5m	1522	4.1m
Milford Haven	0932	7.2m	2153	7.3m
Newquay	0824	7.2m	2046	7.3m
North Shields	0622	5.5m	1903	5.1m
Oban	0848	3.8m	2118	4.0m
Penzance	0756	5.6m	2017	5.8m
Plymouth	0916	5.5m	2129	5.7m
Portsmouth	0215	4.8m	1500	4.9m
Southport	0131	9.7m	1357	9.1m
Stornoway	1006	4.7m	2220	5.1m
Weymouth	0923	1.5m	2136	1.6m
Whitby	0701	6.0m	1939	5.6m
Wick	0216	3.8m	1453	3.4m
Workington	0224	8.9m	1450	8.4m

Sun & Moon



Lighting up

Belfast	2038 to 0618
Birm'ham	2014 to 0605
Brighton	2004 to 0603
Bristol	2016 to 0612
Carlisle	2025 to 0604
Cork	2040 to 0634
Dublin	2035 to 0621
Glasgow	2034 to 0608
Hartleech	2025 to 0614
Inverness	2037 to 0601
London	2005 to 0600
M'chester	2019 to 0605
Newcastle	2020 to 0559
Norwich	2003 to 0553
Penzance	2024 to 0626

Terrawatch

Just under a year ago, the east coast of Greenland was hit by a megatsunami. Triggered by a large landslide entering the uninhabited Dickson Fjord, the resulting tsunami was 200 metres high - or more than 40 double-decker buses. Luckily no one was hurt, though a military base was obliterated. Now analysis of the seismic data associated with the event reveals that the tsunami was followed by a standing wave, which continued to slosh back and forth within the narrow fjord for many days. Angela Carrillo Ponce, from the German Research Centre for Geosciences in Potsdam, analysed the seismic data, recorded at earthquake monitoring stations more than 3,000 miles away, and found signals persisting long after the 16 September 2023 landslide. Using satellite images and computer modelling, Ponce and her colleagues were able to confirm the presence of a standing wave of about 1 metre in height that lasted for more than a week. Their findings, published in the Seismic Record, warn that climate change is accelerating the melt of Greenland's glaciers and permafrost, increasing the chance of landslides and subsequent megatsunamis. **Kate Ravillious**

Around the world

Algers	32	Lisbon	28
Ams'dam	28	Madrid	37
Athens	36	Malaga	31
Auckland	12	Melb'rne	32
B Aires	35	Mexico C	32
Bangkok	30	Miami	32
Barcelona	46	Milan	30
Basra	33	Mombasa	28
Beijing	30	Moscow	30
Berlin	29	Mumbai	32
Bermuda	31	N Orleans	32
Brussels	31	Nairobi	32
Budapest	35	New Delhi	32
C'hagen	27	New York	26
Cairo	35	Oslo	26
Cape Town	27	Paris	26
Chicago	27	Perth	26
Corfu	30	Prague	26
Dakar	30	Reykjavik	32
Dhaka	30	Rio de J	32
Dublin	30	Rome	30
Florence	35	Shanghai	30
Gibraltar	29	Singapore	30
H Kong	31	Stockholm	30
Harare	30	Strasb'g	30
Helsinki	32	Sydney	26
Istanbul	32	Te Aviv	32
J'dsburg	30	Tenerife	26
K Lumpur	30	Tokyo	32
K'mandu	29	Toronto	26
Kabul	29	Vancouver	26
Kingston	33	Vienna	32
Kolkata	28	Warsaw	26
L Angeles	28	Wash'ton	29
Lagos	26	Well'ton	26
Lima	26	Zurich	26

Golf

Hull makes hay on opening day of Women's Open

Page 36 →

Interview

Matt Forde on how football aided his cancer recovery

Page 38 →



Sport



▲ Xabi Alonso and his Bayer Leverkusen players celebrate winning last season's Bundesliga title in stunning fashion

Same again, Xabi?

Alonso's Leverkusen look team to beat despite Bayern's busy summer

BY ANDY BRASSILL



Patrik Schick, again. The DFL Super Cup rarely provides any pointers for the forthcoming Bundesliga season, but what this year's curtain raiser seemed to indicate is that maybe last season is still happening. The match-up between Bayer Leverkusen and Stuttgart – last season's top two, with the former having won both league and DFB Pokal – was a reminder of an extraordinary 2023-24 campaign, as was the bristling intensity of Saturday night's fixture, uncommon for such a nominal showpiece.

And the manner was everything. Even though it took a penalty shootout for Leverkusen to lift the fifth major trophy of the club's 120-year history (and the third in the last four months under Xabi Alonso), the way in which *Die Werkself* got there suggested that we are probably not looking at a one-hit wonder. They played all but the first 37 minutes against Stuttgart with 10 men at the BayArena – debutant Martin Terrier was sent off for an ill-considered, studs-up lunge – and trailed midway through the second half when Deniz Undav gave the visitors the lead with his first touch.

Yet there was no hint of panic, no launching it in the mixer. Leverkusen passed their way around their opponents looking for an opening, even with time running out, until Schick coolly sidefooted in after a dazzling move with little more than a minute to go in normal time. It was stirring stuff, and a reminder that Leverkusen are the team to beat. They never are beaten by German teams these days, their only defeat in 53 games last season coming to Serie A's Atalanta in the Europa League final.

Keeping together the core of an unexpectedly winning team is rare but the tone was set for the champions from the moment Alonso affirmed his commitment to stay, spurning the advances of some of the world's biggest clubs. In keeping with this ambience of stability – not to mention the club's quiet efficiency, cultivated over decades – there have been no flights of fancy building the squad, collecting a few sensible pick-ups rather than going for big sexy statement signings. Aleix García, the midfield glue who held together Girona's extraordinary season in La Liga and performed excellently in the Super Cup, has arrived along with the Rennes duo of Terrier and the promising centre-back Jeanuël Belocian.

Leverkusen's stealthy summer has been, almost completely, the exact opposite of Bayern's. The start to the *Rekordmeister's* off-season suggested more of the chaos of recent years, with Alonso, Ralf Rangnick and even old flame Julian Nagelsmann among those to politely decline the vacant head coach position before Vincent Kompany was installed.

Yet many doubts over whether the former Burnley manager could handle one of the apex jobs in European football were almost completely eclipsed by sporting director Max Eberl's explosive early transfer business, snaring Michael Olise, João Palhinha and Stuttgart's excellent centre-back Hiroki Ito before the Euros were even done. It was a clear statement of intent.

It's not all been plain sailing since, from Ito breaking a foot in a pre-season friendly at Duren to the struggles in clearing out several surplus players in the squad; the eventual completion of the double deal to send Matthijs de Ligt and Noussair Mazraoui to Manchester United elicited a deep sigh of relief in Bavaria. More need to follow to show that Bayern are really on the way back, with Kompany having minimal margin for error.

Dortmund are in a similar reconstructive situation. If the end of Bayern's run of 11 straight Bundesliga titles was the headline of last term, BVB not being the team to dethrone them left questions needing to be answered. Leverkusen have about half of Dortmund's budget, telling you all you need to know about the latter's shortcomings in direction and strategy in recent years.

Comprehensively redefining themselves under a bright new coach, decorated former player Nuri Sahin, they could easily swim or sink but a reaction had to happen after last year's deeply disappointing fifth place, despite reaching the Champions League final.

Stuttgart's excellent Super Cup display, which should really have resulted in them winning it, was perhaps even more significant than Leverkusen's. They have lost some key players but then again they lost their two best, Konstantinos Mavropanos and Wataru Endo, at the beginning of last season, and that didn't stop them engineering a breathtaking 40-point swing from the previous campaign. Not just keeping the prolific Undav but also

hanging on to their coach, Sebastian Hoeness, is huge, giving them a clear, exciting philosophy going into a demanding Champions League campaign.

Even if Stuttgart did eventually get Undav back on board the Bundesliga has lost a star in Dani Olmo, after Leipzig sold one of Spain's Euro 2024 mainstays to Barcelona. While Marco Rose said Olmo was "impossible to replace", it did give the club the opportunity to sign the Norwegian teenager Antonio Nusa, a wide player with superstar potential. Meanwhile Xavi Simons has returned on a second successive one-year loan deal.

Newly promoted St Pauli and first-timers Holstein Kiel are unlikely to be troubling those peaks of the table but should add further colour to the league – one revitalised by freshly minted champions, who have no intention of slipping back anonymously into the pack.

Bayern snared Olise, Palhinha and Ito before the Euros were even done – a clear statement of intent

Sport

Tennis US Open countdown

Cheers greet Sinner after world No 1's avoidance of doping ban

Tumaini Carayol
Flushing Meadows

All eyes were on Jannik Sinner at the US Open yesterday as he made his first appearance on the practice courts in New York since the announcement that he had avoided a doping ban after successfully arguing two positive anti-doping tests had been the result of contamination.

On Tuesday, Sinner and the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) revealed that the player had twice tested positive for trace amounts of the banned substance clostebol from anti-doping test samples taken in March and an independent tribunal had subsequently determined that Sinner should bear no fault and not be deemed negligent for the failed tests.

The announcements came a day after Sinner had won his second Masters 1000 title at the Cincinnati Open, defeating Frances Tiafoe in straight sets. After flying to New York and not appearing at the Billie Jean King Tennis Centre on Tuesday or Wednesday, Sinner trained with Grigor Dimitrov yesterday in a midday practice session.

Sinner, who followed his fellow world No 1, Iga Swiatek, on practice court 1, emerged to strong cheers from fans in stands that were completely full and the 23-year-old was also greeted warmly by Dimitrov. Sinner was flanked by his coaches Simone Vagnozzi, who oversaw the session, and Darren Cahill, who frequently offered his charge advice.

While Sinner has previously been accompanied by his fitness trainer Umberto Ferrara and physiotherapist Giacomo Naldi, they remained absent yesterday. During the independent tribunal, Sinner's team said Ferrara had purchased Trofodermin, an over-the-counter spray, and Naldi had used the spray to treat a cut

on his finger. During his regular massage treatments, they argued, Naldi had contaminated Sinner. On Tuesday, Cahill said that they are still deciding what Sinner's team will look like going forward.

"At the moment it's just Simone and I, the two coaches that are here," said Cahill. "And we're supporting Jannik at the moment. [The decision] is just 24 hours old. So we will just keep pushing forward and see what happens."

As Sinner and Dimitrov trained together, with the likes of Carlos Alcaraz, Daniil Medvedev and Ben Shelton all on nearby courts, the tournament's singles draws were released at noon.

Sinner, the top seed, will face home favourite Mackenzie McDonald in the first round in a stacked opening half. Sinner could potentially battle Medvedev, the fifth seed and 2021 champion, in the quarter-final. Alcaraz, the third seed and 2022 champion, has been drawn in Sinner's half and the pair could meet in the semi-finals.

Fresh from his Olympic gold medal, Novak Djokovic will begin his pursuit of a 25th grand slam title against a qualifier. Djokovic may face the 28th seed, Alexei Popyrin, the shock Montreal Masters 1000 champion earlier this month, but the 37-year-old has been handed a helpful draw on his return to hard courts for the first time since March.

Unlike other tournaments that host a live draw ceremony, the US Open organisers have adopted an unpopular "draw reveal" format, with the tournament conducting the draw in private before revealing it at an appointed time.

There were ample notable matchups to reveal in the women's draw, one of which will see Emma Raducanu mark her return to New York against Sofia Kenin, the 2020 Australian Open champion. Raducanu is seeking her first win at the US Open since her shock 2021 triumph after losing to Alizé Cornet in the first round of her title defence in 2022 and then missing the 2023 edition following surgery.

Raducanu has been in strong form when she has competed, following up her fourth-round run at Wimbledon with a quarter-final at the Washington WTA 500 tournament. However, she has not played since the first week of the hard court swing as she opted out of playing qualifying rounds at the bigger tournaments.

Among the other British players, the No 31 seed, Katie Boulter, will face a qualifier in round one and Harriet Dart will open her tournament against the French wildcard Chloe Paquet. Jack Draper, seeded 25th, has a tough first-round match against Zhang Zhizhen of China. A potential third-round match against Alcaraz looms if both players live up to their seedings. Dan Evans, meanwhile, has been drawn against the 23rd seed, Karen Khachanov.

Elsewhere, Naomi Osaka will mark her return to the US Open against Jelena Ostapenko, the 10th seed and former French Open champion. Fresh off her Olympic gold medal, Zheng Qinwen, the seventh seed, will face a tough first-round match against Amanda Anisimova, a wildcard. Both Swiatek, the top seed, and the second seed Aryna Sabalenka will face qualifiers in round one.

Golf AIG Women's Open

Hull makes her mark on windswept first day

Early leader enjoys playing in tough weather but rivals were less than impressed

John Huggan
St Andrews

For the first time in 45 years, the distinctive figure of Laura Davies is not in the field for the Women's Open. But no matter. On the evidence of an opening day dominated by the weather – and rounds that took more than six hours to complete – the present and future of English women's golf is in good hands.

Leading the way is Charley Hull. On an ultimately crowded leaderboard containing the defending champion, Lilia Vu (69), and the world No 1, Nelly Korda (68), no one could match the five-under-par 67 shot by the 28-year-old. She has compatriots for company in the shape of her close friend and the former champion Georgia Hall and the world's No 1 amateur, Lottie Woad.

So it was that, aided by the afternoon easing of a wind that gusted to more than 40mph before lunch, Hull was the best of the English bunch. Five birdies easily outnumbered the lone bogey on the six-time Solheim Cup player's card as she toured the historic premises. Little wonder then that her final putt for one last birdie on the 18th was closely followed by a broad smile.

"It was loads of fun," Hull said. "Watching television this morning I would have taken four-under par. So

five is great. Yes, the last three holes the conditions eased and it was a bit easier. It all took ages though."

After a 71 that concluded spectacularly with an eagle two on the par-four 9th, Hull's cheery demeanour replicated that of Hull. It contrasted starkly with the downbeat countenance of Gemma Dryburgh. After her round of 79, the Scot claimed her ball moved twice on the 11th green. "Don't know how it was playable to be honest," was her damning verdict.

Despite having to contend with the worst of the winds, Hull enthused at length about what she calls "my favourite place and course in the world".

"I looked out my hotel room window at 5am," she said. "The flags on the range told me it was blowing a

gale. I was like: 'That's great; hope it stays like that.'

"Today was definitely some of the toughest weather I've played in. And probably the windiest. It was such a battle. But I love those conditions, whether I play bad or not. This is a true Women's Open. I believe this is how it should be every day."

There are minuses and pluses within that assessment. After what she admitted was a poor drive off the first tee, Hull needed as much as a three iron to cover the 184 yards between her ball and the green. Going in the opposite direction, her closing eagle came by way of a massive 327-yard drive – "At first I thought about hitting a five iron short of the bunkers" – and an unerring 20-foot putt.

As for Woad, the 20-year old opened with a potentially disheartening bogey at the par-four 10th. But thereafter she displayed the class shown when she made three birdies in her last four holes to win the Augusta National Women's Amateur this year.

On level par, she is already close to attaining her pre-championship aim of "being around for the weekend". More of the same should take care of that.



▲ Charley Hull drives from the sixth on the way to her opening-round 67
JASON BUTLER/GETTY IMAGES

Formula One

Hamilton reiterates F1 must stage a race in Africa

Continued from back page

one thing reading about it or being on the news but actually seeing or speaking to kids who are walking 10km to school to get an education then walking 10km back.

"They have tough lives over there and it is mostly women and children that are affected the most. There wasn't a lot of men because they are either killed or taken in the different conflict areas. That was really heavy to see and experience."

Hamilton also reiterated his long-held belief that it was time F1 hosted a race in Africa. "We can't be adding races in other locations and continue to ignore Africa, which the rest of the world takes from. No one gives anything to Africa," he said.

"There's a huge amount of work

there that needs to be done. I think a lot of the world that haven't been there don't realise how beautiful the place is and how vast it is. Having a grand prix there would really be able to highlight how great the place is and bring in tourism and all sorts of things. So why are we not on that continent?"

Yesterday in Zandvoort, Max Verstappen also suggested he could call time on his career in Formula One when his current contract with Red Bull ends in 2028. The world champion will compete in his 200th race at this weekend's GP, his home race, where he admitted his enjoyment of the sport would play a key role in deciding his future.

The 26-year-old driver enters the second half of the season looking to secure his fourth F1 world championship in his 10th season but was explicit that he felt the bulk of his career was already complete. When asked if he expected to compete in another 200 races he was blunt.

"No. We have passed halfway for sure," he said. "It's been an incredible ride. It doesn't feel like 200, we do a lot of races now in a year so you add them quite quickly."

The Dutchman was the youngest driver to race in F1 when he made

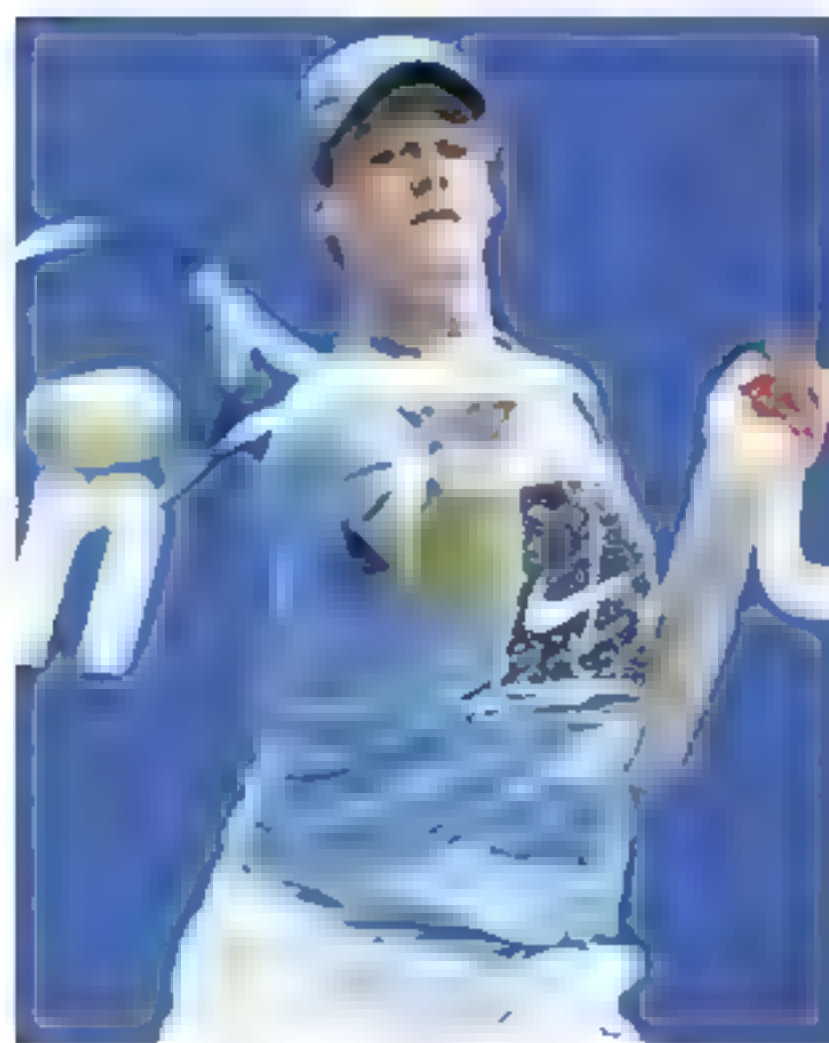
his debut aged 17 in 2015. With the current F1 season a record 24 races, amassing a further 200 meetings would take just over eight years, taking Verstappen into his early 30s, an age past which with many drivers now still race and are competitive. Hamilton is 39 years old, while Fernando Alonso is now 43, driving for Aston Martin.

Verstappen, however, insisted he would consider his options before deciding to race on beyond 2028. "2028 is so very far away, in my mind I am not thinking about a new contract, at the moment I just want to see how it goes," he said.

"Also to see about the new regulations, if it is fun or not then in 2026 or 2027 there is a lot of time to decide what happens. So I just keep everything open. I am quite easy going about it."



▲ Max Verstappen will consider his options at the end of his current deal



▲ Jannik Sinner received a warm welcome at Flushing Meadows

Cricket County Championship roundup

Flintoff Jr makes impression on debut but Lancashire struggle

Tanya Aldred

Rocky Flintoff, the 16-year-old son of Andrew, celebrated his GCSE results with a debut first-class innings for Lancashire. Flintoff, batting at four, strolled out at 33 for two, Lancashire's youngest first-class cricketer, all wonderfully familiar gait and rush of the bat. A thumping drive and a timely pull for four, plus a couple of lucky moments, were enough

to get the juices flowing till he was caught at backward point for 32 to his first ball after lunch. Surrey continued to run through an inexperienced Lancashire lineup, with half the team 23 or under, and they were bowled out for 204, with four wickets for Jordan Clark and three for Dan Worrall. Rory Burns and Dom Sibley then whisked Surrey to 83 without loss before rain stopped play. The day had started with a minute's silence in memory of Surrey's Graham Thorpe.

More youthful brilliance at Chester-le-Street, where 19-year-old Ben McKinney panned a gorgeous 121 in his just his second first-class match for Durham. McKinney, a former England Under-19s captain and part of the Lions team that beat Sri Lanka last week, was ruthless on the Nottinghamshire bowlers, reaching his hundred with a peachy cover drive and off just 117 balls.



▲ Rocky Flintoff scored 32 before falling to his first ball after lunch

Once he had departed, Alex Lees picked up the baton, reaching a more pedestrian, but just as valuable, 145.

The seagulls swooped on breezy North Marine Road, where Tom Alsop's 84 held the fort for Sussex in a crucial Division Two promotion battle. Australia's Daniel Hughes collected 53. Jonny Bairstow was shipshape behind the stumps in his first Yorkshire Championship appearance of the season.

Derbyshire's Zak Chappell ripped through Glamorgan with six for 47; Middlesex's Toby Roland-Jones took three wickets as Northamptonshire struggled; Warwickshire's Jacob Bethell and Michael Burgess made half-centuries against Somerset; Ian Holland built a hundred against Gloucestershire and Worcestershire's Joe Leach took six for 52 to demolish Kent.

Results and cricket scoreboard

Football

UEFA EUROPA LEAGUE QUALIFYING

Playoffs: First leg

Viktoria Plzen	(0) 1	Hearts	(0) 0
Oyegoke 90+60g		10 506	

PAOK	(1) 4	Shamrock Rovers	(0) 0
Chery 45+50g, Taron 48			

UEFA EUROPA CONFERENCE LEAGUE QUALIFYING

Playoffs: First leg

Chelsea	(0) 2	Servette	(0) 0
Nkunku 50pen			

Copenhagen	(0) 2	Kilmarnock	(0) 0
Diks 76pen			

Lincoln Red Imps	(2) 2	Larne	(1) 1
Gomez 23, Joe 42		Lusty 16	

Panevezys	(0) 0	The New Saints	(0) 3
		Davies 52, Williams 64	

St Patrick's	(0) 0	Istanbul Basaksehir	(0) 0

SKY BET LEAGUE TWO

Notts County	(3) 4	Grimsby	(1) 1
Jatta 6, Crowley 15 57		Rodgers 45+4	

Jones 45+1			

Cricket

FIRST MEN'S TEST (day two of five)

Old Trafford Sri Lanka 236 (DM de Silva 74, M Rathnayake 72). England 259-6 (JL Smith 72 no, HC Brook 56)

Full scorecard on page 43

FIRST MEN'S TEST (day two of five)

Rawalpindi Pakistan 448-6 dec (Muhammad Rizwan 171 no, Saud Shakeel 141, Sami Ayub 56) Bangladesh 27-0

Bangladesh trail Pakistan by 421 runs with 10 first-innings wickets remaining.

VITALITY COUNTY CHAMPIONSHIP

Division One (day one of four)

Durham v Nottinghamshire

Riverside Durham (3pts) lead Nottinghamshire (1) by 393 runs with five first-innings wickets remaining

Durham First innings

AZ Lees b Hutton	145
BS McKinney c Hameed b McCann	121
*SG Borthwick b James	26
*OG Robinson c Harrison b James	13
AJ Turner not out	62
G Clark c Hameed b James	7
CF Parkinson not out	4
Extras (lb3, lb3, nb6)	15
Total (for 5, 96 overs)	393

Fall 189, 231, 247, 369, 388.

To bat B de Leede, BA Raine, N Wagner, DM Hogg.

Fall 9, 33, 73, 98, 155, 160, 173, 175, 204.

Bowling Worrall 17-4-31-3, Clark 13-4-3-57-4, Curran 10-0-21-1, Lawes 11-0-51-0, McKerr 7-0-41-2

Surrey First innings

*RJ Burns not out	44
DP Sibley not out	37
Extras (nb2)	2
Total (for 0, 21 2 overs)	83

To bat BS Sudharsan, RS Patel, 18T Foakes, WG Jacks, J Clark, SM Curran, C McKerr, T Lawes, D Worrall.

Bowling Williams 5-2-6-0, Boyden 4-2-18-0, Balderson 6-0-23-0, Aspinwall 3-0-26-0, Iyer 3-0-10-0

Toss Surrey elected to field.

Umpires D. M. Ims and RA White

Warwickshire v Somerset

Edgbaston Warwickshire (1pt) lead Somerset (2) by 277 runs with four first-innings wickets remaining

Warwickshire First innings

RM Yates b Davey	69
*AL Davies c Rew b Aldridge	27
WMH Rhodes b Overton	22
H Shaikh c Lammonby b Ball	8
J Bethell not out	60
E Barnard c Rew b Davey	0
DR Mousley c Umeed b Overton	10
*MGK Burgess not out	63
Extras (lb9, w1, nb8)	18
Total (for 6, 76 overs)	277

Fall 52, 94, 125, 140, 144, 165

To bat C Rushworth, OJ Hannon-Dalby.

Bowling Davey 17-5-49-2, Overton 19-5-59-2, Ball 18-4-50-1, Aldridge 15-3-66-1, Leach 7-0-44-0

Somerset ARI Umeed, T Kohler-Cadmore, TA Lammonby, TB Abell, T Banton, JHEK Rew, KL Aldridge, *C Overton, JM Davey, MJ Leach, JT Ball

Toss Somerset elected to field

Umpires A Wharf and S O'Shaughnessy

Worcestershire v Kent

New Road Worcestershire (3pts) trail Kent (0) by 34 runs with eight first-innings wickets remaining.

Kent First innings

T Mueyee c Jones b Leach	56
BG Compton c Roderick b Finch	20
*DJ Bell-Drummond c Brookes b Leach	0
JA Leaning c Roderick b Leach	6
JDM Evison c Roderick b Finch	7
*HZ Finch c Libby b Hartshorn	5
G Stewart b Leach	26
MW Parkinson c Jones b Taylor	13
A Jordan not out	20
ARJ Osborne c Jones b Leach	0
G Garrett c Jones b Leach	0
Extras (lb6, nb12)	18
Total (49.5 overs)	171

Fall 73, 73, 79, 98, 103, 103, 133, 157, 171

Bowling Leach 11-5-2-52-6, Taylor 15-4-35-1, Hartshorn 12-6-18-1, Finch 7-2-51-2, Brookes 4-1-9-0

Worcestershire First innings

*GH Roderick not out	53
JD Libby c Finch b Osborne	30
K Ali c Mueyee b Jordan	17
RP Jones not out	17
Extras (b2, lb4, nb14)	20
Total (for 2, 46 overs)	137

Fall 89, 113.

To bat A. Hosh, *BL D'Oliveira, EA Brookes, TAI Taylor, J Leach, AW Finch, JW Hartshorn.

Bowling Stewart 11-1-33-0, Osborne 8-0-40-1, Jordan 11-3-20-1, Garrett 11-4-21-0, Evison 5-1-17-0

Toss Worcestershire elected to field

Umpires M Newell and PR Pollard

Fall 5, 9, 9, 18, 20, 32, 87, 107, 107, 139.

Bowling Chappell 16-4-47-6, Reece 10-3-30-2, Dal 10-1-19-0, Brown 8-0-46-1, Potts 3-0-14-0, Morley 0-3-0-6-1

Derbyshire First innings

HRC Came not out	58
LM Reece b van der Gugten	9
TBD Guest c Kellaway b Leonard	3
WL Madsen not out	41
Extras (nb8)	8
Total (for 2, 36 overs)	119

Fall 21, 41

To bat *DL Lloyd, AHT Donald, Z Chappell, J Morley, NJ Potts, PR Brown

Bowling Van der Gugten 11-3-19-1, Sheat 10-2-32-0, Douthwaite 6-0-27-0, Leonard 7-1-31-1, Crane 2-0-10-0

Toss Derbyshire elected to field

Umpires BJ Debenham and BJ Peverall

Gloucestershire v Leicestershire

Bristol Leicestershire (1pt) lead Gloucestershire (2) by 291 runs with three first-innings wickets remaining.

Leicestershire First innings

RK Patel c Bracey b de Lange	47
IG Holland c Charlesworth b Dale	104
*LJ Hill c Hammond b Akhter	5
AM Rahane c Bancroft b Goodman	12
*PSP Handscomb lbw b Charlesworth	5
R Ahmed c Bancroft b Akhter	60
L Kimber c B de Lange	20
L Trevisakis not out	16
BGF Green not out	1
Extras (b4, lb8, w1, nb8)	21
Total (for 7, 67 overs)	291

Fall 66, 77, 115, 147, 245, 273, 282

To bat TAR Scriven, J Hill.

Bowling Dale 15-3-51-1, Goodman 15-1-63-1, De Lange 16-4-58-2, Akhter 15-1-86-2, Charlesworth 3-1-6-1, Price 3-0-15-0

Gloucestershire CT Bancroft, BG Charlesworth, OJ Price, MAH Hammond, *JR Bracey, *GL van Buuren, CDJ Dent, Z Akhter, M de Lange, DC Goodman, AS Dale

Toss Gloucestershire elected to field

Umpires J Shantry and S Shanmugam

Middlesex v Northamptonshire

Northwood Northamptonshire (0) lead Middlesex (2) by 167 runs with three first-innings wickets remaining

Northamptonshire First innings

PP Shaw c Stoneman b Roland-Jones	24
EN Gay c Robson b Roland-Jones	42
R Vasconcelos c Roland-Jones b Heim	13
*L Procter b Heim	0
GA Bartlett c Robson b Bamber	4
RI Keogh c Robson b Brookes	25
*LD McManus not out	26
J Broad lbw b Roland-Jones	0
BW Sanderson not out	23
Extras (b5, lb1, nb4)	10
Total (for 7, 44.4 overs)	167

Fall 31, 49, 61, 78, 109, 113, 113.

To bat D Leach, YS Chahal.

Bowling Bamber 10-4-2-45-1, Roland-Jones 13-2-34-3, Brookes 12-2-41-1, Heim 9-2-41-2

Middlesex SD Robson, MD Stoneman, MDE Holden, JL du Plooy, SS Eskinazi, N Fernandes, JLB Davies, *TS Roland-Jones, TG Heim, HJ Brookes, ER Bamber

Toss Middlesex elected to field

Umpires H Adnan and N Pratt

Yorkshire v Sussex

Scarborough Sussex (0pts) lead Yorkshire (3) by 187 runs with one first-innings wicket remaining.

Sussex First innings

DP Hughes c Tattersall b Coad	53
TJ Haines lbw b Coad	0
TGR Clark c Luxton b Thompson	5
TP Alsop not out	84
JM Coles lbw b Thompson	5
*TJA Simpson c Revis b Hill	16
FJ Hudson-Prentice c Hill b Revis	12
JJ Carson c Bean b Revis	12
OE Robinson c Hill b Moriarty	2
JD Unadkat c Tattersall b Revis	0
SF Hunt not out	1
Extras (lb1, nb2)	3
Total (for 9, 72 overs)	187

Fall 5, 14, 75, 85, 125, 134, 168, 171, 172

Bowling Coad 19-4-52-2, Thompson 17-2-45-2, Hill 16-6-33-1, Revis 15-3-37-3, Moriarty 5-0-19-1

Yorkshire A Lyth, FJ Bean, RH Wharton, W Luxton, *JM Bairstow, *JA Tattersall, GCH Hill, JA Thompson, MI Revis, BO Coad, DT Moriarty

Toss Yorkshire elected to field

Umpires T Lingley and J Middlebrook

Tennis

US OPEN QUALIFYING (Flushing Meadows)

Men: Final round: T Skatov (Kaz) bt B Harris (GB) 4-6 6-0 6-3; J Choinski (GB) bt M Cressy (US) 6-0 6-7 (5) 7-6 (10)

Women: Final round: Y Starodubtseva (Ukr) bt S Kartal (GB) 2-6 6-3 6-3; E Lys (Ger) bt L Miyazaki (GB) 6-1 6-2

ATP WINSTON-SALEM OPEN (North Carolina)

Quarter-finals: L Sonogo (It) bt P Kotov (Rus) 6-3 7-5; D Goffin (Bel) R Hujketa (Aus) 6-1 6-3; P Carreno Busta (Sp) bt A Yuzk (Aus) 6-3 4-6 6-3

WTA CLEVELAND OPEN (Ohio)

Quarter-finals: A Potapova (Rus) bt A Bogdan (Rom) 6-2 6-1; M Kessler (US) bt A Rus (Neth) 6-4 6-2

B Haddad Maia (Br) bt C Burel (Fr) 6-2 6-2

Golf

AIG WOMEN'S OPEN (St Andrews)

Leading first-round scores (GB/IRE unless stated): 67 C Hull, 68 Yin R (Chn), N Korda (US), 69 L Vu (US); A Lee (US), Shin J (Kor); Lee M (Kor); M Sargo (Jpn); P Tavatanakit (Tha); 70 Kim H (Kor); M Osato (Jpn); 71 Shin J (Kor); G Hall, L Ko (NZ); S Kowai (Jpn); H Kawasaki (Jpn); L Strom (Swe); 72 A Jutanugarn (Tha); A Buhai (SA), A Pelaez (Sp); A Thitikul (Tha); R Zhang (US); Chien P (Tai); G Lopez (Mex); S Sakuma (Jpn); M de Roe (Bel); H Yoshimoto (Jpn); E Anacona (Arg); L Wood, J Lopez (Sp); Zhang W (Chn); 73 Tseng Y (Tai); Kim I (Kor); A Ewing (US); A van Dam (Neth); J Gustavsson (Swe); L Maguire, M Stark (Swe); J Kupcho (US); S Schmelzel (US); N Koerstz Madsen (Den); W Meechai (Tha); A Kim (US); Y Kawamoto (Jpn); B Law; C Alexander (SA); E Grech (Fr)

Cycling

VUELTA A ESPAÑA

Stage six (Jerez de la Frontera - Yunquera, 185 km)

1 B O'Connor (Aus) Decathlon-AG2R LMT 4h 28min 12sec

2 M Firgo (It) Israel-Premier Tech +4 33; 3 F Lipowitz (Ger)

Red Bull-Bora-Hansgrohe +5 12; 4 C Berthel (Fr)

Decathlon-AG2R LMT; 5 C Rodriguez (Sp) Arkea-B&B Hotels; 6 G Leemreize (Neth) Team DSM-firmenich PostNL all at same time

General classification

1 B O'Connor (Aus) 23hr 28min 28sec, 2 P Rogic (Svn) Red Bull-Bora-Hansgrohe +4 51; 3 J Almeida (Por) UAE Team Emirates +4 59; 4 F Lipowitz (Ger) Red Bull-Bora-Hansgrohe +5 18; 5 E Mas (Sp) Movistar Team +5 23; 6 C Rodriguez (Sp) Arkea-B&B Hotels +5 26

Athletics

DIAMOND LEAGUE LAUSANNE (Switzerland)

Women: 100m: 1 D Asher-Smith (GB) 10.88sec, 2 T Davis (US) 10.97; 3 M Kamubundi (Swn) 11.06

Other notable finish: 7 D Neita (GB) 11.20

Women: 800m: 1 M Moraa (Ken) 1min 57.91sec, 2 G Bell (GB) 1.58 53; 3 J Reekie (GB) 1.58 53

Men: 400m: 1 M Hudson-Smith (GB) 43.96sec, 2 M Samukonga (Zam) 44.06; 3 B Kebnatshipi (Bot) 44.22

Other notable finish: 5 C Dobson (GB) 44.53

Fixtures

Fixtures

Newmarket 1.35 Jowddah 2.10 Valiant Knight

2.45 Twilight Jazz 3.20 Promethean



Cycling O'Connor adds Vuelta stage win to his set

Ben O'Connor completed his collection of stage victories in all three of cycling's Grand Tours by winning stage six of the Vuelta a España yesterday, and also took the overall lead after his solo run left everyone behind. O'Connor was part of a breakaway group early in the race but by the penultimate climb and with 28km left to race, the Australian went for glory on his own. Italy's Marco Frigo came in second, four minutes and 33 seconds behind the O'Connor, with Florian Lipowitz finishing third. The sixth stage bizarrely started from a supermarket in southern Spain, with the riders making their way past marketing banners on their way out to the road. Reuters

Athletics Hudson-Smith breaks 44-second mark again

Olympic 400 metre silver medallist Matt Hudson-Smith continued his fine season with another sub-44 second showing at the Lausanne Diamond League. His run of 43.96 held off Muzala Samukonga, who finished second in 44.06. Dina Asher-Smith won the women's 100m in 10.88sec while Georgia Bell and Jemma Reekie took second and third in the 800m behind Kenya's Mary Moraa. Elsewhere, Norway's Jakob Ingebrigtsen avenged his Paris 1500m woes by finishing well clear of gold medal-winning Cole Hocker of the US. Stuart Goodwin

Golf Højgaard makes bright start in defence of title

Rasmus Højgaard got his title defence off to a dream start as he fired an opening 65 yesterday to lead the Danish Championship by two shots. The 23-year-old made history last summer as he became the first Dane to win of the event and he impressed once again on home soil on the opening morning as he made an eagle, five birdies and one bogey to reach six-under. Wet and windy afternoon conditions meant none of the later starters were able to get close, with Frederic LaCroix, Jannik de Bruyn and Sam Jones his nearest challengers on four-under. PA Media



Ben O'Connor took the overall lead by winning stage six of the Vuelta

Sport Football

Merino set for Arsenal after Real Sociedad accept offer

Ed Aarons

Arsenal are set to complete the signing of Mikel Merino after Real Sociedad accepted an offer for the Spain midfielder worth over £32m. Negotiations over a deal for the 28-year-old have been taking place

for several weeks with Sociedad president's insisting Arsenal must match their asking price for Merino. Jokin Aperribay was understood to have arrived in London for further talks with Arsenal's sporting director, Edu, on Wednesday, with a breakthrough then reached 24 hours later.

Arsenal are believed to have agreed to pay £28m up front for the former Newcastle midfielder who had one year of his contract with Sociedad remaining, with another £4.2m in potential bonuses. Merino is expected to sign a four-year deal having been left out of Sociedad's first game of the season, a 2-1 defeat at home against Real Vallecano on Sunday. He had made no secret of his desire to join Arsenal after rejecting the offer of a new contract.

"Merino was clear that he didn't want to say he was renewing and then leave. It wasn't a surprise to us," said Aperribay. "Unfortunately, one of the teams we didn't want to show up showed up."

Arsenal remain in talks with Nottingham Forest over Eddie Nketiah after a £25m offer was rejected last week. They are expected to increase their bid for the 25-year-old striker, who has agreed personal terms for a move to the City Ground, with Arsenal likely to accept £30m.

Wolves have also made an offer to take goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale on loan, with Espanyol's Joan Garcia mooted as his replacement should the England goalkeeper leave.



Mikel Merino is closing on signing a four-year contract with Arsenal

Football in brief

Crystal Palace

Textor ponders bids as he nears Everton deal

John Textor is considering two offers and has interest from four other investors for his 45% stake in Crystal Palace as he attempts to accelerate his efforts to buy Everton. The American has been on Merseyside for talks with Everton's owner, Farhad Moshiri, over a takeover of the club, with a deal expected to be agreed by the end of the week. The leading obstacle regarding Textor's offer is that he is required to sell his shares in Palace in order to buy Everton. Last week the Palace chairman, Steve Parish, said he would not try to stop Textor leaving. "He wants to go and do something else," Parish said. "We're helping him do that." **Ed Aarons**

Everton

Dyche admits club could let Calvert-Lewin leave

Sean Dyche has said Everton's financial situation may force them to accept an offer for Dominic Calvert-Lewin next week despite his desire to keep the striker. The Everton manager would be loth to lose Calvert-Lewin but also powerless to keep him should a tempting bid arrive before next Friday's deadline. "We are in a better position because of player

trading but it is not solved," Dyche said. "Therefore there would still be a moment where the big people at the club get a phone call and then it is down to them." **Andy Hunter**

Newcastle

Trippier asks to depart against Howe's wishes

Kieran Trippier has asked to leave Newcastle and, although Eddie Howe wants the full-back to stay, there is a sense that the 33-year-old will depart, possibly on loan, before the end of the month. Everton has been mentioned as a possible destination. As Newcastle beat Southampton 1-0 last Saturday, Trippier was an unused substitute with Tino Livramento occupying his preferred right-back role. Given that Trippier has put his house up for sale and came close to joining Bayern Munich last January, news of his unrest comes as no surprise. It would seem a natural fit were he to be reunited with Dyche who, like Howe, managed him at Burnley, but there is also interest from Atalanta and Galatasaray. **Louise Taylor**



Kieran Trippier was an unused substitute in Newcastle's first match



'There's no drug that makes you feel like football'

Thinking about seeing his beloved Forest again gave comedian Matt Forde hope after life-changing surgery

Dominic Booth

The pain came quickly, like a shot to the top of the leg. Matt Forde was only mildly concerned as he was performing at the Edinburgh festival, but sought a swift trip to the doctor anyway. It was probably a slipped disc pressing on a nerve, they said. But it was not long before his world was turned into tumult.

A cancerous tumour called a chordoma was discovered at the bottom of his back after an MRI scan. "You're not sure how your life is going to turn out at that point," says Forde, who was told the base of his spine would have to be removed in life-changing surgery. It was his only option if he wanted to survive.

Waiting for the operation "was like knowing I was going to be in a car crash. It was going to be traumatic and painful and take a long time to recover from, but it was for my own good."

A year later, Forde is in better health and good spirits. He has a stoma and a colostomy bag for life and, temporarily, needs walking sticks, but is virtually back up and running. He credits his wife and the brilliant staff at the Royal National Orthopaedic hospital in Stanmore, north-west London for helping him through. His other main coping mechanism? Football.

"When I was in a lot of pain, nothing took me out of it better. I had to stop watching *Married at First Sight* because the arguments on that show made the pain worse. Whereas football is completely immersive. For an hour and a half, you forget you're on sticks, that you've got cancer, that you're in pain. It's medication, it's like voodoo witchcraft. There's no drug

that makes you feel like football at its highest."

As a Nottingham Forest and England fan, Forde has been through his fair share of highs and lows. But the kindness and goodwill the club showed throughout his treatment went way beyond football. The former manager Steve Cooper made regular phone calls to him, he received videos from Harry Toffolo and Anthony Elanga; Ryan Yates and Joe Worrall would regularly check in. He even received visits from a boyhood idol.

"Stuart Pearce came to hospital a few times. We wouldn't always talk about football, we'd talk about life and music. He's phenomenal, a really special person. He'd heard I had cancer through a mutual friend, Jonny Owen, who's on the board at Forest. I'd met Stuart a couple of times before but I was never quite sure he'd remembered me."

"Stuart was so perceptive. His advice was about how social circles work, how some friends would reach out to me and others wouldn't, it was sociology and psychology. His visits were so entertaining."

It wasn't just the direct help from Forest that ensured Forde could see light at the end of the tunnel. During his darkest days lying on a hospital bed, he would envisage himself at the City Ground. It was his therapy.

"When I was in the pits of despair, I would tell myself that I existed in the future. I would almost talk to my future self and I'd say: 'We get through this, we go to the pub, we do comedy again and we go to football matches again.' It was like a moment of time travel."

And it happened. When he was back on his feet, Forest invited him to a game - and on to the pitch

'Stuart Pearce came to hospital a few times. He's phenomenal, a special person'

▼ After major surgery Matt Forde says he can't wait to go back to the City Ground

MURDO MACLEOD/THE GUARDIAN

before kick-off. Standing there while the club anthem, *Mull of Kintyre*, was belted out, it took all of Forde's strength not to break down in tears. "It's just one of those moments when you reflect on how severe your experience has been. The City Ground is so moving and atmospheric anyway, but when you've been away for so long, you worry you might never go again. I grew up going to that ground, so I will remember that moment of magic for the rest of my life."

Forde believes Forest, and football in general, deserves more credit than it receives for the way it handles such situations. "Tons of clubs do stuff like this and it's not done for clicks or social media, it's done because they genuinely feel one of their own is going through something difficult. That stuff doesn't always get publicised."

"I really felt they wanted to look after me. Yates, Elanga, they're so bright and smart, as well as being very gifted footballers. They realise the privilege they have playing for a club like Forest. They genuinely care."

And what about Cooper? The man who cared so deeply about Forest - and Forde himself - is now in charge down the road at Leicester. Will the pair still exchange messages? "He's a special person and his place in Forest history is secure, to get us promoted was something nobody managed in 23 years. I have messaged him and I wish him well - I just hope Leicester don't finish above us."

Forde is back at the Edinburgh festival, performing his show titled *The End of an Era*, and he will be on a nationwide tour from October to March. While going back to comedy has been restorative, his next goal is a return to Forest. "I'm already looking at the fixtures and planning which game," he says. "Those moments when you go, you savour every second, every smell. I can't wait."

"I think we'll have a better season. I don't think we're far away from being a bit more safe, just not to be in a relegation fight would be lovely."

Survival would be more than enough for Matt Forde.

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Sport
Football Europa Conference League playoffs, first leg

Chelsea double advantage late on

Noni Madueke celebrates after coming off the bench to seal Enzo Maresca's first win
 CHRIS LEE/
 CHELSEA FC/
 GETTY IMAGES



Nkunku silences boos as Blues ease into ascendancy

Chelsea 2
 Nkunku 50pen, Madueke 76

Servette 0

Jacob Steinberg
 Stamford Bridge

It was not exactly all sweetness and light for Chelsea during this prosaic win over Servette. Those hunting for optimism could find it in encouraging displays from some new faces, while Christopher Nkunku's penalty and a sharp goal from Noni Madueke during an improved second half should ensure that progress to the Europa Conference League is secured in Switzerland next week, but there were also moments when discontent with the club's direction under Todd Boehly and Clearlake Capital was captured by bursts of impatience from the stands.

There was a fair bit of grumbling after a tepid opening period, during which it was hard to see why Mykhailo Mudryk has been preferred to Raheem Sterling in attack, and later there would even be hints of

opposition to the positional, possession-based style of play under Enzo Maresca. The Italian will have noticed the boos that followed during the second half when Moisés Caicedo played the ball back from the halfway line.

The strange thing is that it was the right decision from Caicedo given that the midfielder was Chelsea's deepest outfield player and under pressure. Maresca, who was pleased to earn his first win as head coach, must have been exasperated. Surely applause should be the response to a player keeping the ball. After all, it was not long before Chelsea had doubled their advantage after Madueke rounded off a move that began with some clever passing out of defence.

It was an important goal for Madueke, a young winger desperate to earn opportunities in Maresca's packed forward line, and it gives Chelsea breathing space before they meet Servette in the second leg. After a year out of Europe, it would be a major shock if a two-goal lead is not enough to see them into the group stage.

Maresca could dwell on the positives, even though he was not happy with the chances his side conceded during the closing stages. He

acknowledged that Chelsea "played with fire" after going 2-0 up and admitted that his players are still learning. Madueke, Maresca said, needs to be more consistent. There was praise for Marc Guiu's workrate and a smile about the young forward's comedy miss in the second half.

The good news is that Maresca is confident that Cole Palmer, a second-

half substitute, will be fit to face Wolves on Sunday. It was worrying to see Palmer wincing and clutching his right hamstring after full time.

"In some moments, I really liked the team on and off the ball," Maresca said. "At the start the team was very aggressive. Also, because we are in a process, there are some moments we can manage better."

Events have moved so quickly at Stamford Bridge that even the editors of the matchday programme were beaten by the decision to hand Sterling's No 7 shirt to Pedro Neto. A mess, though? Not so, says Maresca. He has his preferred group of players so nobody could be surprised that Sterling, Ben Chilwell and all the other outcasts in a squad that needs heavy trimming were absent again.

The changes keep coming. João Félix was paraded before kick-off after joining from Atlético Madrid and Chelsea's starting XI featured six full debutants. Kiernan Dewsbury-Hall, a Maresca favourite from his Leicester days, tried hard in midfield. Neto did not see enough of the ball on the right.

Mudryk remained an enigma on the left. Everything is scattergun with the Ukrainian. After beating just wide, he ruined a counterattack with a stray pass. After beating Keigo Tsunemoto, he knocked the ball behind for a goal kick.

Asked about Mudryk's inconsistency, Maresca would liken his decision-making to the toss of a coin. "This is Mudryk," he said. "It is not only tonight. Since he joined the

club, he had some good moments and some bad moments. If he becomes more consistent, he can take one step forward. We are going to try and help him. He needs to understand that we will give him the ball in the final third and he has to make the right decision. A lot of mistakes is about the choice."

Chelsea were booed off at half-time. Servette, who finished third in Switzerland last season, were comfortable. Filip Jørgensen, a new signing from Villarreal, thwarted Dereck Kutesa with a good save.

Yet Chelsea lifted the mood at the start of the second half. Pressing with more urgency, they made the breakthrough when Guiu forced an error and Dewsbury-Hall released Nkunku, who rounded Jérémy Frick before being brought down by the Servette goalkeeper.

The tension evaporated after Nkunku buried his penalty. The atmosphere felt lighter when two substitutes combined, Enzo Fernández releasing Madueke, who raced clear before lashing a shot inside Frick's near post. It was another flash of Chelsea's potential, but there is still work to do.

Villa chase Sterling

Aston Villa have held talks over a move for Raheem Sterling, who is looking for a new challenge after being told he has no future at Chelsea. Sterling is keen to leave Stamford Bridge before the transfer window shuts next Friday. The winger has interest from Villa, who are hoping to add another attacker to their squad, although moving the 29-year-old could be a challenge given he has three years left on a deal worth £325,000 a week. There is a sense Villa could be open to a loan deal if a workaround can be found on his wages. **Jacob Steinberg**

Chelsea
 4-2-3-1
 Jørgensen (84),
 Disasi (78),
 Adarabioyo,
 Badash'e, Veiga,
 Caicedo (Lavia 84),
 Dewsbury-Hall 5,
 Neto (Madueke 57),
 Nkunku (Fernández 58),
 Mudryk, Guiu
 (Palmer 58)

Servette
 4-2-3-1
 Frick, Tsunemoto,
 Rouiller, Severin,
 Mazikou, Ondo, Ja,
 Douane (Van Moos 69),
 Stevanovic (Antunes 61),
 Cognat (Ouattara 85),
 Kutesa (Magnin 69),
 Crivelli (Guilleminot 61)

Referee Jérémie Pignard (Fr)

Hürzeler happy to seek advice of his elders at Brighton

German manager is, at 31, the Premier League's youngest and he wants to tap into all available knowledge reserves

Ed Aarons

At just 31, Fabian Hürzeler is the youngest permanent manager the Premier League has ever seen, but that doesn't mean he is afraid to seek advice from the more experienced members of his squad. Take Danny Welbeck for example: the former England striker scored the second goal in Brighton's impressive 3-0 victory at Everton on the opening weekend of the new season and spent almost 13 years at Manchester United, who Hürzeler's side face tomorrow in his first home match. So who better to ask for tips about overcoming Erik ten Hag's side?

"That's one of my styles to lead - I'm listening to the experienced players because I can also learn from them," said the German manager, who ended his playing career at the age of 23 to concentrate on coaching and is more than two years younger than Welbeck. "That's something very open and the players know it. In the end they have experienced more things on the pitch than me - I'm not afraid of saying that because it's true. I can learn from them and hear their opinions to help me prepare for a match against Manchester United. Danny Welbeck played there and maybe he has some

more knowledge about the club and about the behaviour of their players. I would be silly if I didn't use it. In the end, of course, it's my job to make the decisions and the clear preparation to have the right match plan for a great opponent."

After a summer that has seen them spend almost £150m on new recruits, with Brighton now heading into the second game of the campaign top of the nascent league table, supporters have plenty of reasons to feel excited. Potential moves for Fenerbahçe's Turkey left-back Ferdi Kadioglu - who has also been linked with United - and Celtic's Danish midfielder Matt O'Riley would only increase their optimism, having already seen the club's record transfer fee smashed this week by more than £10m, with the £40m acquisition of Georginio Rutter from Leeds. But it is their vibrant new manager that has set most pulses racing on the south coast.

A few days before their win over Everton that also featured a sparkling debut from another new signing, Yankuba Minteh, a baseball cap-wearing Hürzeler was given a standing ovation from more than 300 Brighton fans who were invited to the club's annual pre-season forum. As well as being asked if he would get a tattoo of a seagull should Brighton do the double over arch-rivals Crystal Palace this season, the former St Pauli manager was also questioned about whether he sees this post as a "stepping stone" - perhaps with their experience of his predecessor Roberto De Zerbi in mind. "I don't see myself as most

important," was his response. "It is more about giving my knowledge and my passion to the players and the club and to you."

Hürzeler continued on that theme as he prepared for the meeting against United - a side against whom Brighton have enjoyed considerable success, with four wins in their past six meetings. Yet while he dismissed the suggestion that his team could be considered favourites, he was adamant that supporters can play a big part in building early momentum.

"I had a talk with them and for me it's always important - the expectations from them, what they want to see the team doing on the pitch," he said. "In the end it's about giving everything you have in your body. They should have the feeling during every game that every player gives everything he has. I always try to build a connection to the supporters,

because in the end I want them to be our 12th man, and they support us in every situation."

He added: "In games like Manchester United there will be moments where we have to suffer together. There will be moments where maybe United control the game. And then you have to stand together, then you have to suffer together. I would love that the fans are still behind us and supporting us. That's our job, to build this connection with the fans, and it only works if we give a lot of input and a lot of energy on the pitch, and a lot of intensity."

Hürzeler insisted that Billy Gilmour is available and that the Scotland midfielder would still be at the club after the transfer window closes - "yes and yes," he said, despite reports that Napoli have verbally agreed a fee for him. Minteh is free to play after passing concussion protocols following his withdrawal against Everton, while Rutter is also expected to take some part.

"He's a little bit German, he's a little bit from the UK and a little bit French, so there's a mix of everything inside his character," Hürzeler said of the France Under-21 international. "He's laughing a lot and I think he's integrated fast in the group, and that's the most important thing. Of course, I'm convinced that he will help us on the pitch, by his attitude working against the ball, by his quality in possession. He has something special. I have known him since he played for Hoffenheim and I followed his career.

"He can help us because he has a very good feeling for positioning, a very good feeling for finding the gaps in between the lines from the opponent and taking the game forward. He's always trying to play vertically and I also like his reaction and his behaviour out of position and after losing the ball. So I think he has a very interesting package that will help us."



Fabian Hürzeler got off to a fine start with a 3-0 victory at Everton

Ten Hag tells his players to stay motivated

Jamie Jackson

Erik ten Hag has warned his Manchester United players to accept being dropped from the matchday squad and that they must remain motivated to contribute when required.

The manager left Jadon Sancho out of last September's trip to Arsenal, causing the player to challenge the decision publicly. The situation led to Sancho's departure to Borussia Dortmund on loan, although he is now back in Ten Hag's plans. The 24-year-old was left out of the 1-0 opening day win over Fulham because of an ear infection.

Yesterday, Ten Hag was asked if Sancho was available for tomorrow's visit to Brighton for the early kick-off. "We will see," said the Dutchman. "I hope we will have a squad with double positioning, that means you can't select all the players. But you need them all throughout the season. The attitude of the players is very important, sometimes they will be disappointed, but they have to deal with it."

Ten Hag hopes to sign Paris Saint-Germain's Manuel Ugarte before the summer window closes. United's preference is to buy the midfielder but view the French club's £51m valuation as too high, so a loan move is also being explored.



▲ Jadon Sancho did not play against Fulham because of an ear infection

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Steady Smith eases England into lead on rain-hit day

Ali Martin
Emirates Old Trafford

It was thought that Sri Lanka might well be the reverse of West Indies: tourists who boast experience with the bat while potentially being light with the ball. But on a tense second day that prediction was creaking slightly, Dhananjaya de Silva's attack having delivered a disciplined, probing display to leave this first Test delicately poised.

At stumps, as bad light and then rain brought an early close after just 57 overs of play, England had Jamie Smith to thank for ensuring nothing was settled and a lead had at least been established. Stationed at No 6 – the upshot of that hamstring injury to Ben Stokes – Smith's unbeaten 72 had taken the hosts to 259 for six in

reply to Sri Lanka's 236 all out; 23 runs ahead but with their lengthy tail having already begun.

Even against a softening ball these were tricky conditions for Smith to negotiate and Sri Lanka were pushing hard to exploit them. Asitha Fernando, a diminutive terrier of a seamer, was the pick, asking questions throughout for figures of three for 68. Among these was the prized wicket of Joe Root, caught well on the drive by Dinesh Chandimal for 42, to leave England 125 for four and bring about Smith's entrance.

After missing out on a maiden Test century by just five runs three weeks ago, and going short during a spell in the Hundred since, Smith admitted his first series for England had been a draining one. But the disappointment of Edgbaston will soon be overcome and perhaps on day three.

Across stands of 62 with Harry Brook and 52 with Chris Woakes, and admittedly having got one reckless attempted scoop out of his system early on, the 24-year-old also embodied England's more refined approach overall. The boundary count was relatively low for the so-called Bazballers – Smith struck five fours and one six in his innings, England 22 and one overall – but on a sluggish outfield a run-rate of 4.2 was still maintained.

Smith will be grateful not to have received the balls that did for his two partners, with Brook and Woakes suffering identical dismissals by Prabath Jayasuriya. The left-arm spinner has enjoyed a rapid start to Test cricket – 71 wickets in his first 12 outings – but even he looked bewildered by the beauties that pitched on leg-stump and kissed the top of off.

It was no less than Sri Lanka

deserved, however, even if the star of day one, Milan Rathnayake, was the one weak link with the ball. Still, the debutant's first-class career-best of 72 from No 9 was a clutch performance; one that meant his teammates could set out with purpose once mizzling rain had relented to allow a 1.15pm start and two extended sessions.

Floodlights on, a blanket of grey cloud overhead, and with a chill wind blowing across Old Trafford, it was a far cry from Katuneriya, the fishing village that Asitha hails from. But armed with a Dukes ball, a right-arter who has been skilled and disciplined enough to average 26 in Asia was in his element, reeling in Ben Duckett and Ollie Pope masterfully first thing.

Starting from the James Anderson End after gloom forced the spinners to take the new ball the evening before, Asitha was presenting a deliciously

Trescothick backs keeper

Jamie Smith could line up for England's white-ball team against Australia next month according to Marcus Trescothick, England's interim white-ball head coach. "We've seen enough of him playing for Surrey in the T20 or other competitions," said Trescothick, also assistant coach for the Test team. "The way he's come in and taken to international cricket is probably the most important part of that. He just seems very suited to international cricket. Whether he plays some of it [the series against Australia] or all of it, I don't know. We'll wait and see and work out what squad we're going to pick." **Taha Hashim**

upright seam and soon saw a tight lbw against Dan Lawrence overturned on height. But two balls later, with a single pinched by Lawrence in between, the review system went Sri Lanka's way when a full delivery nipped back into Duckett's pads for 18.

It was a ball that jagged the other way that castled Pope, his first innings



as England captain ending with six runs to his name and a wry smile as he trudged off. At the other end Lawrence's first outing at opener displayed his obvious strengths and one weakness, with all but four of his 30 runs scored on the leg side and a flirtation outside off-stump causing his downfall. Vishwa Fernando, the left-arm, was the executioner, making good use of the breeze. England were suddenly 67 for three with it - 169 runs in arrears - and in need of a pushback.

Like Pat Cummins during last summer's Ashes series, De Silva placed sweepers on both sides from the outset and so singles were available; catnip to a couple of busy players like Root and Brook as they set about constructing a stand of 58. Equally, that early nip from a surface that had been sweating under the covers was followed by periods of reverse swing.

It took the return of Asitha to separate the pair, snaring the big fish, Root, on the drive when a low catch was held cleanly by Chandimal behind the stumps. Although Brook ploughed on to his 16th score of 50 or more in just his 26th innings, disbelief soon followed. At least in Woakes, who chiselled out a typically nuggety 25 before suffering the same, he had someone who could empathise.

Day two scoreboard

Old Trafford England lead Sri Lanka by 23 runs with four first-innings wickets remaining.
Sri Lanka First Innings 236 (DM de Silva 74, RMP Rathnayake 72).

England First Innings (overnight 22-0)	Balls	4s	6s
BM Duckett lbw b AM Fernando	18	20	2
OW Lawrence			
c Chandimal b MVT Fernando	30	39	3
*OJD Pope b AM Fernando	6	8	1
JE Root c Chandimal b AM Fernando	42	57	4
HC Brook b Jayasuriya	56	73	4
†JL Smith not out	72	97	5
CR Woakes b Jayasuriya	25	65	3
GAP Atkinson not out	4	10	0
Extras (lb2, w1, nb3)	6		

Total (for 61 overs) 259

Fall 30, 40, 67, 125, 187, 239.

To bat MJ Potts, MA Wood, S Bashir.

Bowling De Silva 2-0-14-0; Jayasuriya 21-5-58-2; AM Fernando 14-0-68-3; MVT Fernando 13-0-51-1; Rathnayake 9-0-53-0; PHKD Mendis 2-0-13-0.

Toss Sri Lanka elected to bat.

Umpires CB Gaffaney (NZ) and PR Reiffel (Aus).

Analysis

Simon Burnton *Emirates Old Trafford*



The overshadowed series that keeps springing surprises to add a hint of intrigue

For much of the day one of the only areas of the ground that could be described as crowded was the most easterly of the unused pitches, clearly recently reseeded and as a result attracting unusual numbers of pigeons. In the similarly sought-after spots on the lower slopes of the Party Stand the supporters' most raucous cheers were prompted not by the game being played in front of them but those they improvised themselves, perhaps with a beach ball or by constructing a tower of empty cups on the head of a snoozing spectator.

Lancashire's website advertised a special offer on remaining tickets for tomorrow - as of tea yesterday there were still 3,281 available, about 12.5% of the ground's capacity. Somehow - and unrelated to the rain that washed out the morning - it is fair to say that interest in this series has yet to catch fire.

In between people constantly banging on about the still-distant Ashes and the distracting announcement yesterday morning - regularly trailed on the big screens - of dates for the infinitely more hypeable visit of India next summer ("It's Cricket but BIGGER," as Lancashire put it on their socials) it has hardly had a chance.

Perhaps there is a sense that we have seen it all before. After all, in England's last Test, against West Indies at Edgbaston last month, they fielded first after losing the toss, restricted their opponents to fewer than 300 runs, started their response poorly and turned their innings around after the arrival of Jamie Smith, who came to the crease when they were 113 behind.

What a contrast to this game, when they fielded first after losing the toss, restricted their opponents to fewer than 300 runs, started their response poorly and turned their innings around after the

arrival of Jamie Smith, who came to the crease when they were 111 behind. They were nursing a lead of 23, with four wickets remaining, when darkness and then rain ended play prematurely.

But even in front of a disappointingly sparse crowd, on another inclement Manchester day (at one point Angelo Mathews, in search of some moisture to assist with his attempts to shine the ball and with absolutely no chance of producing his own, asked the bowler if he could borrow some sweat) and in something widely considered a shoulder-shrug of a series, the sport insisted on being, if not thrilling, then certainly interesting.

That was despite Kamindu Mendis, the 25-year-old Sri Lankan who intriguingly bowls right- and left-arm spin, remaining unused but for a couple of overs as the gloom descended in the

The most raucous cheers were prompted not by the game in front of them but those they improvised



▲ Spectators play a game of their own to pass the time at Old Trafford

◀ Jamie Smith raises his bat after reaching his half-century in an innings full of confidence

ED SYKES/ACTION IMAGES/REUTERS

late afternoon. It was one of those days when, every time nothing interesting seemed to be happening, something really surprising happened.

The only successful reviews from either side came in the space of three balls early on, in which time Dan Lawrence was reprieved and Ben Duckett condemned - the umpire, Paul Reiffel, was presumably still busy brooding about the first decision when he should have been making the second.

Though the bowling was often uninspired it was illuminated by flashes of brilliance. Ollie Pope, whose first innings as England captain lasted eight balls, and Harry Brook, who had looked in superb touch as he scored 56, had the top of their off stumps clipped by deliveries that contrasted in every way but their excellence, the former courtesy of Asitha Fernando's right-arm seam, the latter Prabath Jayasuriya's left-arm spin.

Dhananjaya de Silva's fields were often a little generous - from the start he had three fielders in the deep, two of them on the leg side, offering easy singles when the ball strayed on to the pads. Occasionally, he broke out into deep-funk improvisation: here a silly mid-on for Brook, there a silly point for Chris Woakes.

On Wednesday, England's innings had started against spin from both ends, it being too dark for seam to be safely bowled. Almost exactly 24 hours later, when the umpires decided they had to impose the same conditions, De Silva decided to take his team off. That he did so was probably down to Smith, who was on 72 and looking concerningly or encouragingly good, depending on your allegiance.

He hit Kamindu commandingly through the covers twice in the bowler's first over, the first holding up on a slow outfield for three, the second rocketing all the way to the boundary, and had previously dumped Jayasuriya down the ground for six.

Neither bowler would have particularly fancied extended exposure to a batter high in confidence and ready, with Woakes having just fallen to a second spectacularly unexpected Jayasuriya ripper, to remove the shackles.

When nobody really imposed themselves it had just started to look as if Smith, like the denizens of the Party Stand, was playing a game all of his own.

Historic India to visit in first women's Test at Lord's

◉ Continued from back page

government instructions due to concerns over human rights in the country. In the last Test between the two sides, at Lord's in 2003, Jimmy Anderson took a five-wicket haul on his red-ball debut for England.

"To be welcoming Zimbabwe back for a men's Test match will be a historic moment, more than 20 years since their last visit," Gould said in a statement. "Test cricket is so beloved in this country, and we know that we have an important role to play in supporting developing Test cricketing nations so that this format of the game thrives long into the future."

The ECB has also announced that India will visit England in 2026 to play the first ever women's Test at Lord's. This comes after the Independent Commission for Equity in Cricket's report, published last year, said it was "truly appalling" that England's women had never played a Test at the venue, known as the home of cricket. "It will be a truly special occasion, and one of real significance," said Gould.

Prior to that historic Test, India's women's team will tour England in 2025, playing five T20s and three ODIs from 28 June to 22 July. West Indies' women's side will play England in three T20s and three ODIs from 21 May to 7 June.

After their single match against Zimbabwe next summer, England's men will continue their Test commitments with a five-match series against India, to begin on 20 June at Headingley before concluding at the Oval, with the final Test to begin on 31 July. The other three Tests will take place at Edgbaston, Lord's and Old Trafford. The schedule is not dissimilar to England's in 2023, when the last Test of the summer was completed before the start of August.

The England men's white-ball setup will welcome West Indies for three ODIs and three T20s between the Zimbabwe and India Tests. South Africa will tour in September, also playing three ODIs and three T20s against the hosts. England will then visit Ireland for three ODIs, from 17 to 21 September. Venues have yet to be confirmed for the series.



It will be a truly special occasion, and one of real significance

Richard Gould
ECB chief executive

◀ Jamie Smith hits the ball past Sri Lanka's Kamindu Mendis on the way to an unbeaten 72 on day two of the first Test

NICK POTTS/PA

Blues cruise

Nkunku and Madueke give Chelsea edge over Servette



Page 40 →

Back in action

Sinner greeted with cheers on US Open practice courts

Page 36 →

+
Real deal
Arsenal
set to sign
Sociedad's
Merino

Page 38 →

The Guardian
Friday
23 August
2024



Sport



Asitha makes it hard graft in the gloom

Bowler takes three but England hold narrow lead

Asitha Fernando celebrates after picking up one of his three wickets on day two of the first Test
Full coverage Pages 42-43 →

STU FORSTER/GETTY IMAGES

Test cricket's new lifeline

ICC plans multimillion-pound boost in franchise league fight

Taha Hashim

Test cricket is poised for the introduction of a dedicated fund as the International Cricket Council (ICC) hopes to boost match fees and stem the talent drain to lucrative franchise leagues.

According to reports in Australia, the fund would introduce a minimum Test match fee of \$10,000 (£7,600) for players, helping the national boards which now struggle to match the



Jay Shah supports funds for poorer boards hosting Test cricket*

wages on offer in T20 competitions across the globe.

It is understood the initiative has the support of Cricket Australia and the England and Wales Cricket Board (ECB). Jay Shah, the secretary of the Board of Control for Cricket in India and reportedly in line to become the next ICC chair, has also publicly declared his support for a fund of "\$5m, \$10m or higher" which would offset the costs incurred by poorer boards when hosting Test cricket.

The ECB has shown its willingness

to help other boards by introducing a touring fee when Zimbabwe visit England for a one-off Test next May. Richard Gould, the ECB chief executive, said last month that Zimbabwe would be recipients of the fee next year.

"Normally the way things happen [in bilateral cricket] is that the touring team gets itself into the country and then it's looked after in terms of costs, accommodation, all the rest of it," Gould told Sky Sports. "But there's no fee for that team that's touring. Next year when we play against Zimbabwe, there will be a fee for that team that's touring."

The Test with Zimbabwe, a four-day match, will begin at Trent Bridge on 22 May, the ECB confirmed yesterday as it announced its home international schedule for 2025.

The fixture marks a resumption of relations between the two sides, who have not played each other in a bilateral series since 2004. The ECB suspended ties with Zimbabwe in 2008 on

'Heavy to see': Hamilton speaks out on refugees' plight

Giles Richards
Zandvoort

Lewis Hamilton has spoken out in support of the plight of refugees and displaced people in Africa, decrying the lack of empathy toward them in the UK. He pledged to consider what he could do to support them after an emotional visit to the continent during the Formula One summer break.

Hamilton was speaking before this weekend's Dutch Grand Prix, the first since the sport shut down for the summer, during which period the British driver travelled in Africa, visiting Senegal and Morocco and then the Maratane refugee settlement in the north of Mozambique, where he saw the work of the UN refugee agency, the UNHCR.

When asked if the plight of refugees was not sufficiently recognised in the UK, the seven-time world champion was unequivocal.

"1000%. If you don't see it and experience it or speak to someone who has been seriously affected by it, you couldn't even imagine. We need more empathy for it for sure," he said. "I've been to Africa before so it's not the first time I have been shocked by it. It gets me working my mind. It's great to see organisations like the UNHCR who do amazing work and so I think: 'How can I get on board, how can I help?' So that's now what I am trying to do."

The UNHCR cites Mozambique as being home to over 33,000 refugees and asylum seekers and more than 830,000 displaced people, because of conflicts and natural disasters. Hamilton, who has been outspoken on social issues including equality and diversity in the past and invested in projects to improve both in F1, said the experience had a profound effect.

"I am still digesting the trip, going to a refugee camp and seeing the work being done there, how people who are displaced are affected," he said. "It's



▲ Lewis Hamilton says he wants to help organisations like the UNHCR